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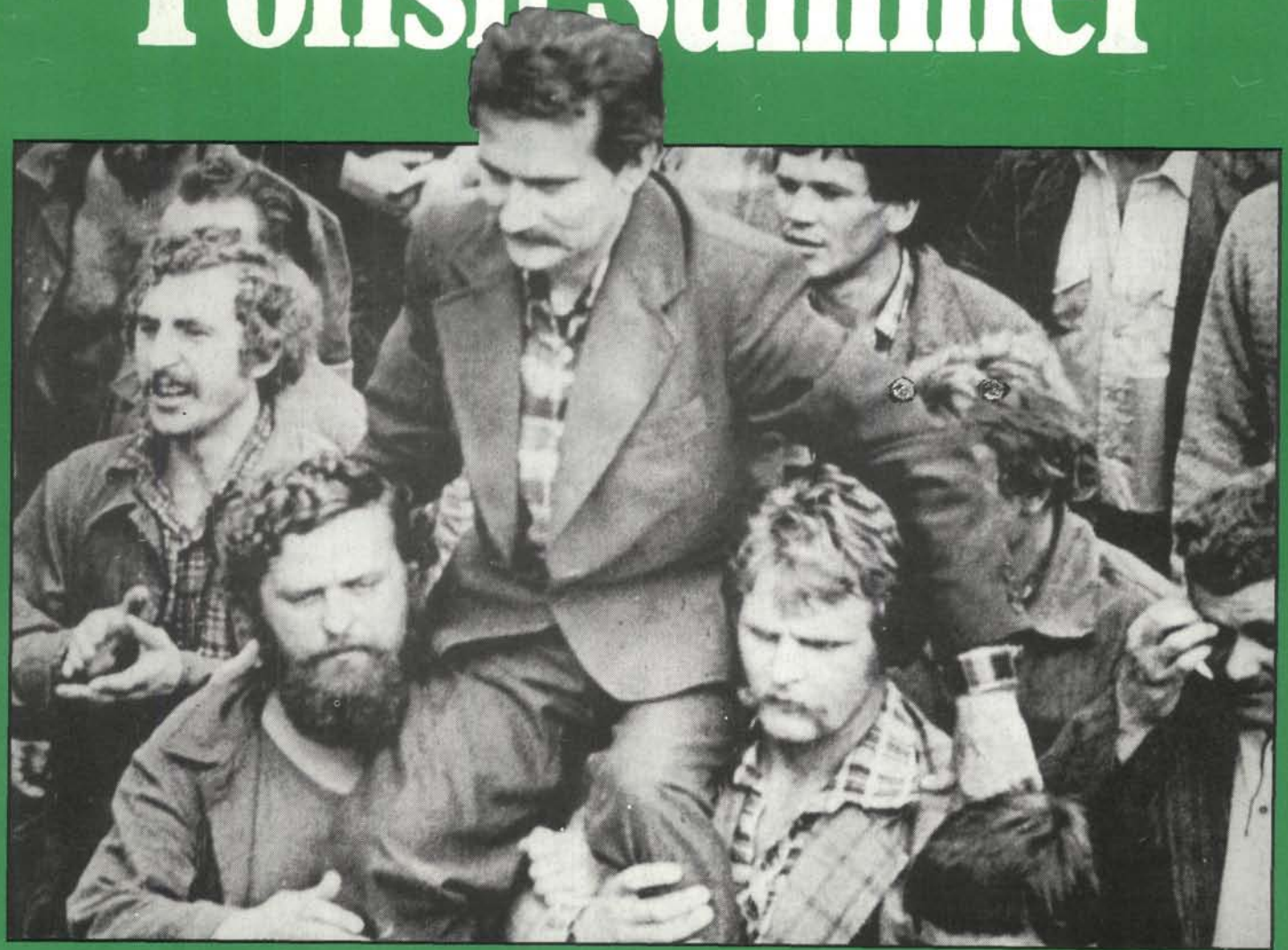

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Marxism Today

Contents

November 1980 Volume 24 Number 11

Focus 2

Heseltine's lunge • Soviet oil prospects
The coup in Turkey • British Rail

Lessons of the Polish Summer - an interview with Wlodzimierz Brus 7

This summer saw a mighty demonstration of working class action in Poland. Its objectives were wide ranging – its main achievement is independent trade unionism. In this interview, Wlodzimierz Brus, the well-known Polish economist, examines the nature of the Polish crisis, the causes of the working class action and the possibilities for a wider democratisation of Polish society. The interview was conducted by Jon Bloomfield and Monty Johnstone.

Andrew Gamble

Thatcher - make or break 14

The Thatcher government marks the most radical break in British politics since 1945. Its objectives are far reaching and fraught with risks for the Right. Andrew Gamble, author of *The Conservative Nation*, looks at the nature of Thatcherism, its record in office and its prospects of success.

Richard Hill

Architecture: the past fights back 21

From high-rise to crowded estates. From ultra-modernism to nostalgic recreations of the past. An architect, Richard Hill, looks at the forces behind the changing shapes of buildings and argues that these are questions too important to be left to the expert: they must be public property.

Discussion 26

Mark Page **Housing**
The author, a housing officer in London, continues the discussion.

Kevin Halpin **May 14: an assessment**
The author, the chairman of the Liaison Committee, writing in his personal capacity, looks at the implications of May 14.

Reviews 29

Michèle Barrett — The Politics of Housework — Gender and Class Consciousness.
Robbie Gray — The Challenge of Labour — The General Strike of 1842.

Notes 32

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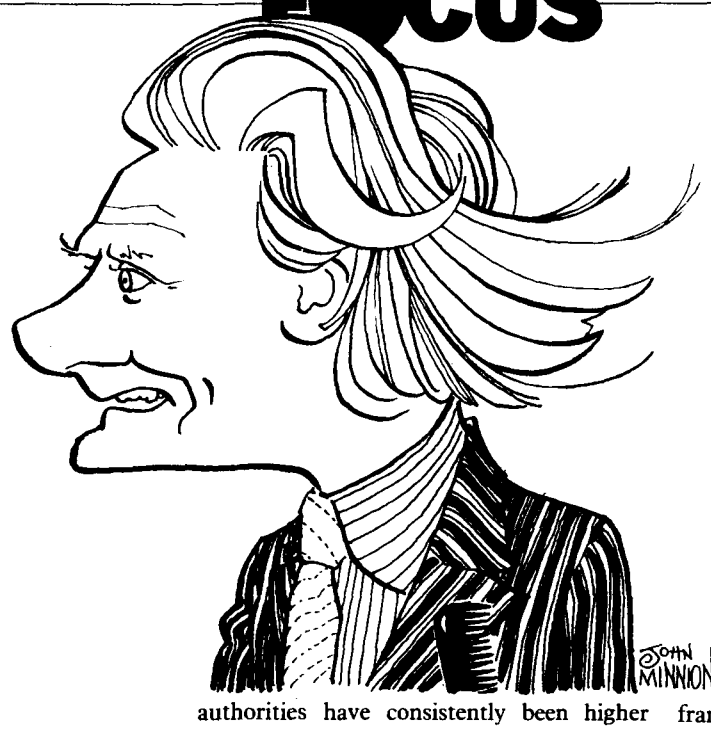

HESELTINE'S LUNGE

When Heseltine shoots from the hip Tory conferences normally applaud. His announcement (Sept 18th) to withhold £200 million of this year's rate support grant, to reduce grants to 14 authorities with rates above a threshold level of 155p and to stop the urban programme money of Hackney, Islington and Lambeth will score points for Tory machismo. But it is not only 'the wets' who will blanch at this latest attack on public services and local democracy. Any minister who manages to unite the Tory dominated County Councils Association and Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth Council, is taking a political risk. To do so on grounds which are admittedly arbitrary, unnecessary and quite possibly unconstitutional and/or illegal suggest that this is a political punch on the nose rather than a part of the coordinated campaign against Micawberism which passes as the ideological front for Tory monetarism.

Nobody disputes this is rough justice. According to the Government's own figures, Brent and Waltham Forest are actually underspending and Hounslow and Sheffield are almost bang on target with an overspend of only 3%. Strictly the rate poundage measure used, that is the pence per pound paid on the rateable value, would have meant that Tory Wandsworth would have been included in the hit list. The comparative figures for Sheffield and Wandsworth are 156.73p and 155.83p. Wandsworth like Manchester has been let off for 'exceptional effort'. Nor do the level of penalties relate to the 'overspends'. Camden and Islington both have bigger penalties than the 'overspends'.

The overspend figures are themselves dubious. Heseltine's own figures show that since 1976 the revised budgets of local authorities have consistently been higher than actual expenditure. There is no reason to suppose that this year's government expenditure targets will not be met by local authorities. The additional cuts are justified by pointing to the manpower levels which account for 70% of local authority current expenditure. Noting that there has already been a reduction of what amounts to 29,000 full time jobs in local authorities between June 1979 and June 1980, the highest reduction ever achieved in one year, the further cuts and penalties are a clear call for more redundancies at the town hall. In fact this full time equivalent figure is largely made up of part time women workers like home helps and school canteen staff. Phasing women out of the work force first clearly will not guarantee men's jobs.

At this stage the focus of the campaign against the new cuts has centred on the legal issues. 13 of the authorities that have been penalised have said that they will challenge the decision in the courts. They have two arguments. Heseltine's ability to penalise particular overspending authorities depends on powers yet to be enacted in the Local Government Planning and Land Bill (No 2). No 1 went straight to the Lords in an attempt to bypass the Commons and only the Labour Party's threat to sabotage the Rhodesian legislation led to No 2 taking a more democratic course. Ironically the Lords are now being lobbied to reject the penalty clauses in the Bill. Secondly they will argue that the Government acted in bad faith, that the authorities were selected on political grounds and that the Government failed to arrive at its decision reasonably.

Whatever the outcome of a legal case the issues raised cannot be resolved within a legal framework. Although the desire to reverse the growth of the public sector has always been a part of this Government's economic strategy the pace of this attack is now being dictated not by their overall policy, but by the failure of their monetarism. Two factors seem particularly crucial: their failure to control the money supply and the devastation of the private sector as measured in reduction of output and massive redundancies. In August, 46,000 redundancies were officially notified to the Department of Employment, bringing the total for the first eight months of the year to 283,000, an increase of 179,000 over the comparable figures for 1979.

Public expenditure cuts are now being proposed, not least by the CBI, as complementary to cuts in industrial capacity and as the formula which will bring down interest rates and avoid tax rises. 'Unemployment for all' seems to be the new slogan. We are heading for a situation where the escalating fall in industrial production is used to justify public spending cuts in a vicious downward spiral.

Such a course is bound to lead to widespread agitation. In this context the political attacks on trade unions in the Employment Act and on local government in the Local Government Planning and Land Bill are more sinister. This Bill, which is amazingly described as seeking 'to give more responsibilities to local authorities with less control from central government', does precisely the opposite.

The new financing arrangements will give central government far greater control over local authority spending. The single block grant which a council will receive is the difference between a notional calculation of the authority's total expenditure and the

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income it will receive from collecting rates. The level of these rates will be set at a point that the Secretary of State considers appropriate. It will be impossible to take account of the needs of particular authorities, for instance those in deprived areas, but because each calculation has to be made individually any authority may be penalised by the Minister if he wishes. As David Blunkett, leader of Sheffield District Council, has pointed out this means that central government can always override the wishes of the local electorate. Other provisions in the Bill have a similar effect. Direct labour departments will be forced to tender work in circumstances to be decided by the Secretary of State and they can be closed down if they fail to achieve unspecified rates of return to be decided by the Secretary of State. Again all capital spending over £5,000 will be subject to central government control.

Local democracy is a fragile flower in British politics. Historically its appeal has only been invoked when the major political parties have clashed on specific policies. Now its existence is seriously under threat an alternative left strategy must take this question on board. This cannot be done in an uncritical way by merely defending what is or has been. We must rethink the political role of local government and formulate proposals for the democratic exercise of political power at local level. Central to such a strategy must be alternative forms for financing local government.

SOVIET OIL PROSPECTS

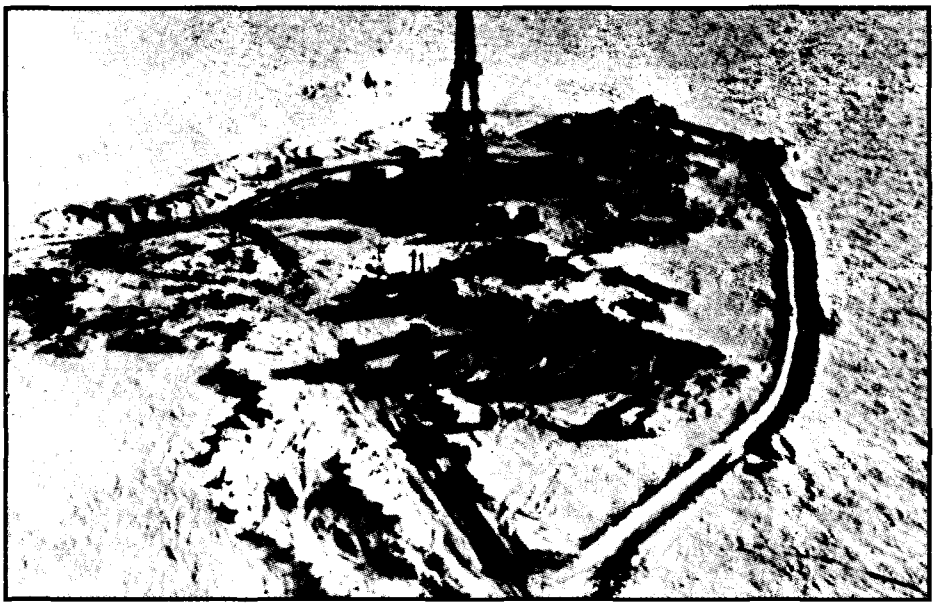
The story of Russian oil and gas production goes something like this.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is, and will remain, a net exporter of oil and gas, certainly for the next decade, probably for well into the second millenium, so say PetroStudies of Sweden. America's Central Intelligence Agency reports exactly the reverse, however. The CIA asserts that the USSR will have to import one million barrels of oil a day by 1985, but leaves the political implications of this to the paranoid imagination of its masters.

Hot on the heels of the CIA comes Atlantic Richfield, the oil company which owns the *Observer* newspaper in London. The company (not the paper) has warned public, press, and American Presidents alike of the real danger of war with the USSR over the Middle East, more especially Iran.

Then comes our own *Petroleum Economist* (worth quoting at length):

> 'The experience of Afghanistan has alerted Western public opinion to the possibility of Soviet military intervention in the Gulf but the Russians themselves will be aware that open aggression, even if successful could easily lead to the destruction of local oil facilities, thus depriving them of their coveted prize. "Peaceful penetration" may be more to their liking — and may therefore represent a more serious threat . . . Potentially, the situation is certainly dangerous, calling for vigilance on the part of the Western powers.'



Leaving aside for a moment whether the cultural psychosis presently raging in Iran had anything to do with American rather than Russian penetration, there seems to be a pattern emerging here, our old friend the cold war has whistled in again. Put very simply, the CIA has invented if not a fictitious enemy, at least a fictitious field of conflict using its own powerful logic which takes us, every decade or so, to the threat of a nuclear holocaust.

The CIA argument follows these sort of lines (I am sure it will forgive me if I caricature its thought process): 'America is running out of oil, prices have doubled this year alone. This cannot be the fault of the Americans dedicated as they are to life, liberty and the pursuit of profit. The Arabs are not capable of organising themselves, as American oil companies have proved for the last five decades, therefore, it must be the fault of the Russians. Russian oil and gas production is below world demand, therefore they will reach out and grab our supplies.'

What Lord Kearton of BNOC said of the oil companies is also true of their political half-brothers, the CIA: 'They think that everybody behaves the way they do'. It behoves the CIA to whip up an imaginary crisis of energy production in the Soviet Union, in order to justify their own freedom of action to assist the oil corporations in their bid to rip-off every other non-Comecon oil and gas producer. (A possible exception to this are the Mexicans and the Canadians, both of whom recently blew a large raspberry at American proposals for an American energy commonwealth.)

Unlike the Americans, Swedish investigators have no particular motive for dissimulating the future production of energy resources from the Soviet Union. Simply speaking, there is no crisis, although there are certain problems, which might be worth listing roughly, if only to put American hysteria into proportion.

(i) Like the rest of the world, the Soviet Union has to apportion a limited resource and must choose ultimately between the understandable desire of the citizen for a private internal combustion engine and the thousand million other uses for fossil hydrocarbons from clingfilm to fertiliser, it must also choose whether its increasingly precious hydrocarbon resources should be sold inside Comecon (the Polish demand being fairly heavy, for example) or outside, to Western Europe (most especially, France).

(ii) Russian technology is, compared to what the American oil companies serve up, rather backward. As available resources decline, the search for oil moves into the deeper waters of the Caspian, and Asov seas, the frozen waters of the Baltic and the swamps of Siberia. These new areas of exploitation require a very high, very expensive technology. Much of this technology cannot be bought from the West for strategic reasons; that is, the Americans own it. One British engineer told me (and he had no very obvious reason to lie) that computing equipment could only be sold to the Soviet

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Union after it was seven years old and then it had to be deliberately sabotaged so that Russian engineers could occupy their time trying to make up the spare parts.

If detente returns, hydrocarbon production in the Soviet Union will rise accordingly. Meanwhile the French are busy trading off their fine offshore industry against supplies of Russian gas through a new pipeline, one of the benefits of not belonging to NATO's inner cabal. Ireland, a non-NATO common marketeer, has also been running their national transport system on Russian 'Rocket' diesel, causing a howl of irony to rise when a boycott was recently proposed in protest against intervention in Afghanistan.

As usual, Soviet geography presents its own extraordinary problems. The technology of pumping oil or gas across from where it is produced to where it is needed verges on the intractable with pipelines crossing vast areas which are pure swamp in the summer and frozen solid during the winter. It was this problem which led the USSR to buy gas from the Shah of Iran to supply the Southern Republics and provides the sole shred of evidence of Soviet concern at recent developments in the Middle East.

One interesting but possibly profitless theory for Russian intervention in Afghanistan is that the Soviet Union feared the spread of an Islamic backlash in Afghanistan spreading to the autonomous socialist republics of Soviet Central Asia. The Russians would not be likely to underestimate the potential of the ideology of Islamic expansionism, nor to welcome it.

Given these problems, the oil and gas industries in the Soviet Union are doing extremely well. True, production reached only 70% of an over-optimistic five-year plan this year, but production of natural gas has increased 112% since 1970, oil production is up 66% while coal has risen 24.5%. Crude/condensate output and new drilling is an 'all-time-high', and even the CIA admits that Soviet reserves are still immense, if increasingly difficult to reach.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union itself has recently announced two steps forward, one step back. The Baltic promises to contain much more hydrocarbons than anticipated. (This will gladden the hearts of the Poles who have had many problems with their lignite-based energy economy, lignite being easier by far to export through Gdansk than to transport to Warsaw during the winter). The Russians are also now proud possessors of dynamically positioned drillships, a complex bit of computer technology which the West has found indispensable during the last decade. On the debit side, Russian scientists recently had to call off their attempt to drill the world's deepest well. Progress is solid, even if the occasional prestige project backfires. As a pretext for a third world war, Russian energy production must be the weakest excuse ever conceived.

THE COUP IN TURKEY

In mid-September, a group of Turkish army generals led by Evren, ousted the right wing Justice Party and installed its own administration. The coup came as no surprise, for the army had issued several ultimata, demanding that the politicians take decisive action in the face of increasing violence and political disorder. Nor was it a novel experience for the Turkish people, for whom it was the third military takeover in twenty years, the earlier coups being in 1960 and 1971. For Demirel, the ousted prime minister, the coup must have seemed like a repeat of the 1971 coup which also swept him from power. He quickly found himself under house arrest with Ecevit, the leader of the opposition Republican People's Party and former prime minister, and activists of both Left and Right were quickly arrested.

The coup was precipitated by the high level of political assassinations over the past year or so, adding up to over 5000, and recently running at an average of 15-20 per day. Those murdered include mayors, journalists, teachers, professors, workers, a former prime minister and an important left wing union leader. The coup also received approbation from the US government, which was very concerned by the political instability on NATO's flank — the second largest armed force in NATO.

But underlying the Turkish crisis is the deteriorating state of the Turkish economy (see *Marxism Today*, Focus, January 1980). With stagnant output, due mainly to acute shortages of essential raw materials and intermediate products, and inflation running at 80-100%, the Turkish economy is in a desperate state and the politicians have been unable to devise any strategy for resolving these problems. The Demirel government raised interest rates aiming to foster domestic savings, but with the result simply of helping the rich. Successive devaluations, imposed by the IMF, as well as a free market mechanism for interest rates, as a condition of loans, have fuelled inflation massively, but have done nothing to help exports which are still concentrated in a few basic agricultural commodities. The associated increase in lending by international agencies and banks does nothing to diminish the burden of Turkey's massive problem of foreign indebtedness. The measures to attract foreign capital in the unlikely event of being successful, will merely foster industry's high dependence on foreign interest as took place in the 1960s and early 1970s. Ecevit's government, which also largely went along with IMF strategy, was equally unable to resolve these problems while in power until late 1979.

Corresponding to this economic impasse has been a political stalemate. Neither the Justice Party nor the Republican People's Party have been able to form majority governments. While the Justice Party actively depended on the support of the Islamic National Salvation Party and the fascist National Action Party, which is reported to be behind the assassinations and violence. And, as a consequence of this dependence, the latter have grown in strength. The result has thus been weak and a process of political polarisation — finally leading to a coup.

The army has acted before as an important force against left wing forces in Turkish society — as exemplified by the 1971 coup in which the decisive action was directed against the labour movement in the main cities and peasant movements in the rural areas. But, paradoxically, under the influence of Western democracy, the army has also represented an important bastion against anti-democratic forces in Turkish society. Thus the 1960 coup against Menderes was in response to his attempts increasingly to suppress political opposition. From it sprang the most democratic constitution in Turkish history which generated a more democratic political life. Indeed, even after the 1971 coup, the generals relatively quickly stepped down following an election, and subsequent years saw a development of democratic rights, notably in the growth of trade union rights, while the 1960 constitution was basically retained.

These past examples may suggest the optimistic perspective of a relatively quick move to democratic elections and civilian rule. But this coup is unlikely to follow the past pattern. Previous coups took place against the background of relative economic stability and rapid boom. The army has no means to resolve the deepening crisis that is afflicting the Turkish economy. Nor can the coup alter the political stalemate which reflects the growing polarisation in Turkish society. The most likely outcome is a shift towards autocratic rule reformulated by a new constitution which will increasingly attack democratic rights and suppress political opposition, but providing no answer to the fundamental problems of Turkish society. With this grim prospect, the Left faces the vital but enormously difficult task of providing a perspective for left advances.

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BRITISH RAIL

1980 has not been a good year for British Rail and clearly it will be even worse for the workforce. Like most other industries BR is feeling the effects of the recession and, as the 'conditions of service' ably demonstrate, it is not one of the most progressive of employers; nationalised or not! During the early part of the year BR tried to sell the reason for the plight of the railways as being the fault of either the steel strike or embargos placed by the railway unions on the movement of certain kinds of traffic. Either way, the unions were being held largely to blame.

In 1979 the Public Service Obligation Grant (PSO), which is the government grant given to BR to run passenger services, was £538m. Compared to the grant given in 1975 this represents a 17% cut in real terms. The crisis which now affects the industry as a result of this cut in the cash ceiling is deliberate Tory policy and is part of their overall strategy of cutting public expenditure. Although we should not delude ourselves that the previous Labour administration was any better when it was under the influence of Bill Rodgers, the member of 'that other triumvirate'.

Liquidity is such a problem for BR that it has inevitably turned the screw on its employees. An immediate ban on recruitment was the first turn of the screw and it is important to remember that, despite the 2 million on the dole, there are, and have been for some time, over 10,000 vacancies on the rail system as a whole. So in many ways the recruitment ban is a ban operating on top of the one which has been covertly applied over the last few years anyway. It is also a major factor in understanding why railway workers work so much overtime and so many of their rest days.

The second indication of the depth of the problem is indicated by the willingness of the BR Board to sell off assets such as British Transport Hotels, Sealink and the BR Property Board, all of which either broke even or made a profit last year. Not only does this myopic response provide no real answers to the problems of the railway industry, it also poses a major threat to the security of employment of NUR members in the hotel and catering side of the industry. As a writer in a recent edition of *Investors Chronicle* pointed out, the fact that the hotels are fully unionised is a positive disincentive for any potential buyers. No doubt, however, Sir Charles Forte would not let such an inconvenience deter him from making a bid and levelling down the conditions of service to those that exist in other hotels owned by his group.

The freight carrying side of the industry is the other area which is being particularly hard hit by the reduction in cash available to the railways. Plans are afoot to reduce dramatically the number of freight and parcel handling depots with the inevitable loss of jobs.

Taken together the above three reactions to the crisis pose serious problems for railway and allied workers. This depression is not the usual run of the mill cyclical type of capitalist recession affecting the railways because overlaying it is the general application of advanced micro-technology especially in the area of signalling; train to signal box communication and the introduction of VDUs into many offices. The unions are still working out their policies in relation to new technology but fundamentally they revolve around a principled acceptance of it provided the benefits are equitably distributed in the form of a reduction in the working week to at least 35 hours, longer holidays and better working conditions generally.

The recession is now so deep that its severity has permeated all ranks of railway management, not least the top, which produced a detailed paper entitled *The Challenge of the Eighties* which comprises 28 pages of general proposals for solving the railway's problems by 'streamlining' and 'rationalising' the system and its allied businesses. Divided into 10 sections the last

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one is devoted to the 'The Manpower Element'. No prizes for guessing its principal aim.

The crisis of cash limits which the Government has forced onto the BR Board is calculated to strengthen their bargaining arm in selling this document to the unions. For their part the NUR and TSSA have collaborated to produce a counter proposal for increasing productivity entitled *A Railwayman's Charter*. The ASLEF have categorically refused to become involved or even associated with the *Charter*. Both papers talk of the need dramatically to improve productivity although the *Charter* spells out in cash terms what it would mean in terms of increased costs. It also lists areas in which the union leaderships believe changes can take place. The introduction of continental rostering (any 5 days out of 7 as opposed to the present system which treats any time worked on a Sunday as overtime), and 4 x 10 hour shifts where management consider it appropriate, are just two examples.

There is unanimity between the unions, however, over the need to collaborate with the Railway Board in making a joint approach to the Government to plead for more money for the system; almost as if the Government has had no hand in creating the situation in the first place. This reaction to finding a way out of what appears to them to be an impasse, though, is likely to have but one outcome. The paper industry is a few months ahead of the railways in adopting the same tactics of a joint union-management approach to bale the industry out from drowning in a sea of imported newsprint. Predictably, the Department of Industry does not appear to be very impressed and there is no reason to believe that their colleagues over in Transport will be any more favourably disposed to the arguments from the railway camp.

The practical effects of the cash limits and the crisis which it leaves in its wake does not, of course, simply affect railway workers but the travelling public also. The main consequences of starving an industry dependant on large cash injections for re-investment and maintenance of track, signalling and rolling stock, is that the system becomes reduced to having the strength of its weakest link.

A highly technological train, as embodied in the Advanced Passenger Train, is useless if its maximum speed is reduced from 150mph to 70 or 80mph for long stretches due to the deteriorating quality of the track. The same fact applies in reverse; there is little point in having fully maintained track and a modern signalling system capable of safely transporting people at speeds of 150mph if, due to cash starvation, rolling stock is so uncomfortable and antiquated that any speed in excess of 45mph becomes rather like taking a ride at the fun fair. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that people look for alternative forms of private transport even if it is more expensive.

Clearly then, the future ability of the railway system to be able to provide a first class service at a price which everybody can afford, will not materialise *simply* by leaving development to technological forces. Despite the diminishing supply of oil the future viability of the railways is a long way from being assured. Unless there is a fusion of effort between railways workers, (through the unions), commuter groups and other organisations which reflect the needs and aspirations of the travelling public, then the Left will find that it has missed the train. The way forward for the Left, therefore, is to organise around the greatest degree of common interest which unite those who either work for or travel by, the railways.

Contributors: **Angie Mason, John Ericson, Saziye Gazioglu, Jon Marks**

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Lessons of the Polish Summer - an interview with Wlodzimierz Brus

Wlodzimierz Brus was Professor of Political Economy at the University of Warsaw until 1968 when he was dismissed under accusations of 'revisionism' and giving ideological support to the students' and intellectuals' revolt. He was also variously Director of the Research Bureau of the Planning Commission and the Vice-Chairman of the Economic Council. Following his dismissal, he became a research worker in the Institute of Housing, Warsaw. Brus, who is a Polish citizen, at present lectures on the socialist economies at the University of Oxford. He has written many works, including three books now in English translation, notably *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems* which won the 1976 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize. He has also contributed to *Rinascita*, the weekly of the Italian Communist Party.

The Polish summer has captivated the attention of socialists and communists throughout Europe. It's the fourth time in the last 25 years that there have been major upheavals of the working class in Poland — in 1956, 1970, 1976 and 1980. On three of these occasions there have been major changes in the government and the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party. This represents a unique set of events in Eastern Europe. How do you think these can be explained?

Every society has its unique features which obviously influence the course of events. In the Polish case the historically ingrained tradition of political struggles is certainly a factor. Since the partitions of Poland at the end of the 18th century, a sequence of resistance and uprisings against oppressive governments made its imprint on the Polish people. In the 19th century this was predominantly a national liberation struggle (but not without social elements, especially with regard to the lot of the peasantry). The beginning of the 20th century — the 1905 revolution — saw the powerful combination of a proletarian movement with the fight against national oppression, particularly by tsarist Russia. In the inter-war period Poland became the scene of prolonged working class struggles, many brutally quelled by armed force (as in Krakow in 1923, and then again in the 1930s during the Popular Front movement). In 1937 a rather extraordinary phenomenon occurred — a peasant political strike. Then came the heroic struggle during World War II. So, as you see, there is quite a tradition of militancy against oppressive state power in Poland. However, the historical factor should not overshadow current socio-economic and political conditions which engender popular protest. From the latter point of view Poland does not seem to me so unique, and as you know there were important manifestations of discontent in other East European countries as well. Perhaps the difference is more in degree than in kind.

Clearly the economy and the character of Polish society have altered considerably in the post-war period. What have been the main features of this development in contrast with the pre-war period?

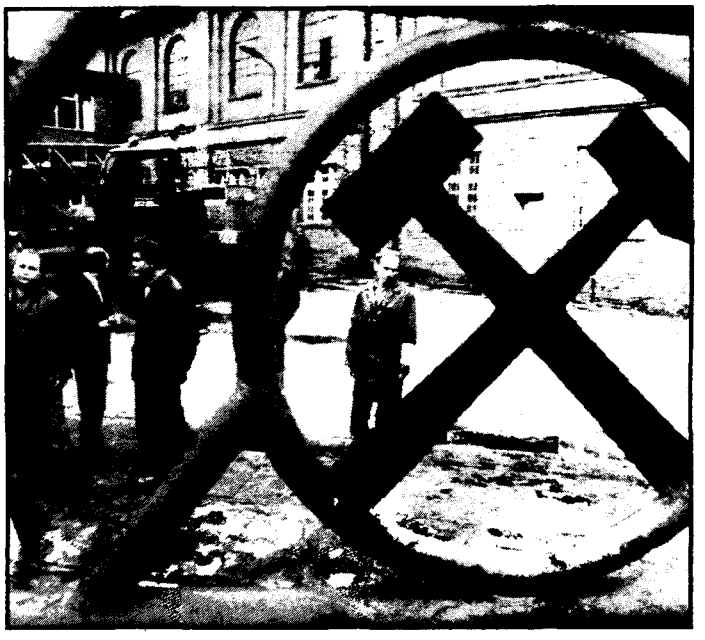
First, the socio-economic structure of Poland altered rapidly as a result of post-war changes in territory (loss of a considerable part of pre-war eastern Poland, most of it dominated by very backward agriculture — acquisition of former German territories, some of which were highly developed industrially). Secondly, the crash industrialisation programme, modelled on the Soviet one, increased considerably the share of industry, especially heavy industry, in the Polish economy. Among others, shipbuilding has developed quite fast in the Gdansk and Szczecin areas, on a previously existing, but very much expanded base. All this led to a considerable rise in urbanisation and increase of the share of non-agricultural occupations. Still the share of agriculture in employment remains quite high because of the continuously dominant role of small private peasant farms.

How much of the industrial force is first generation — I mean straight off the land?

According to figures produced by official Polish sociological investigations on intergenerational mobility some 40% of non-agricultural manual workers in 1972 had their fathers as individual farmers. This is a relatively high percentage.

You said there were still too many people working on the land.

In 1978 the proportion of urban to rural population was 58:42, and the share of population mainly deriving their incomes from non-agricultural occupations was 77% of the total; however, among these 77% are also some groups which are still linked partially to agriculture. On the whole the share of agriculture in employment is higher in Poland than in other countries of a similar level of development (measured, for example, by GNP per head). In 1978 it was the second highest among the European members of CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance — Comecon): 30.2% of the economically active population, just behind Romania with 32.8%. This is obviously the effect of the socio-economic structure of Polish agriculture mentioned before.



The interview was conducted by Jon Bloomfield and Monty Johnstone.
The typescript was typed by Kate Bainbridge.

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Mass meeting in the Gdansk shipyards.

Could we maybe discuss that a little because it's obviously of interest to our readers?

Yes, I understand this. Some people even say that the roots of the Polish difficulties lie in the fact that collectivisation has not been carried out. I regard this view as grossly oversimplified. On the one hand, you have to take into account social realities: the resistance of Polish peasants to collectivisation was (and is) probably the strongest in Eastern Europe and — whatever the abstract assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of collectivisation — any all-out attempt to carry it out by force would have ended in disaster at least on the Soviet scale (even at the peak of Stalinism there was never more than 10% of collectivised land in Poland). On the other hand, collectivisation should not be regarded as the only way to *modernisation* of agriculture, and it is the latter which is badly needed in Poland. The Polish party leadership in the 1970s patently failed to distinguish between the two. Instead of allowing and helping private family farms to modernise, the 1970s have become the period of (faster than ever before) creeping PGR-isation (PGR stands for state farms in Polish). The day-to-day policy toward private farming fluctuated (with turns for the better every time fingers had been burnt), but it never created secure long-term prospects, indispensable for any serious financial and psychological commitment to modernisation. As a result the share of socialised agriculture (state farms in the first place) rose continuously: in overall gross production from 14% in 1970 to over 22% in 1978; in meat production (weight of slaughtered animals) from 16% to over 35%. This proved extremely costly, not only in general money-terms (particularly wasteful was the capital investment), but also in terms of imported inputs per unit of output; especially in the production of pork, where potatoes were massively replaced by imported grain as basic fodder. Here lies one of the main causes of the dramatic deterioration in the agriculture — and food — balance in Polish foreign trade: from surplus in the first part of the decade to huge and growing deficits later.

And the main attempt to resolve those problems has been to raise the meat prices?

When the situation came to some sort of a crunch, this was the attempt. These attempts have been made in 1970, 1976 and now, and all of them have been opposed and rescinded. Formally we are at the prices of 1967 which is nonsense. But the question is why the seemingly rational increase in prices — from an economic viewpoint — is every time rejected by the Polish population. If you take the Hungarian population, they have in the last four years accepted very substantial increases in meat prices. These were accepted because the overall situation was different both economically and particularly politically. In Poland, however, there was a crisis of confidence — and you don't accept measures in such a situation which don't mean anything but an attempt to get out of a crisis at the expense of the population. Nothing else was done — it was the only measure which was attempted.

How far are the problems of availability of farm produce to the towns related to an increase in consumption by the individual peasant family?

The average consumption in Poland has certainly increased. Official statistics for the period between the beginning of the 1970s and now show quite a significant increase — from something like 50 kilogrammes of meat per head to around 70 kilogrammes. Whether the official statistics are accurate or not is another story, but an increase has certainly taken place. It was manifested in more or less the same proportions in the towns as in the countryside. So this is not, I think, the main reason. The main reason is simply the insufficient progress in the modernisation of agriculture, which I discussed earlier.

Attempts were made to modernise Poland's industry in the early 1970s with the extensive use of loans and commercial credit from the West and imported technology. The expected growth of the industrialisation drive in the early 70s didn't materialise as greatly as was hoped. This seriously unbalanced

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the Polish economy which now has £8,000 million worth of debts to the West. Could you explain some of the reasons for the problems with the modernisation drive in industry during the last decade?

Growth in the first half of the 1970s was extremely fast in Poland — in this sense the results were forthcoming. The real question is that of the cost of this adventure — the direct cost and the indirect one — in terms of the present crisis. What actually happened? Gomulka failed to put into motion his modernisation programme (he had one) because he wanted to combine it with an austerity policy. The new leadership which came to power after the crushing of the 1970 workers' revolt could not continue in this way — it had to grant increases in real

Small wonder that very soon the economy found itself deeply off balance.

income. Short of cutting the investment programme (which would amount to abandonment of modernisation), the Gierek leadership could do this only through foreign credits which had the additional merits of bringing in more Western technology. I don't think that in principle this was a bad idea: new capacities should provide after a while the export outlets for paying off the debts, and the increase in real earnings should generate a favourable productivity response.

The idea turned into disaster for three basic reasons. Firstly, the central authorities — after some initial easy successes — lost any sense of proportion as far as the scale of the operation was concerned (it is enough to compare the original five-year plan with what had actually happened in order to see the degree of the 'planned chaos'). Secondly, they failed to carry out the promised structural reforms which would make the economy function more efficiently and make it capable of absorbing the imported equipment. Thirdly, the sectoral structure of growth was wrong — with traditional heavy industries enjoying undisputed priority to the detriment of consumer-goods industries and agriculture (with ideological rigidities compounding the damage). Small wonder that very soon the economy found itself deeply off-balance. The authorities tried to remedy the situation by putting the brakes on the growing demand for food in general and on meat in particular (the abortive price-increase in 1976), but as you know this met with forceful resistance.

In my view, and later events have proved it to be, almost a platitude, the roots of most of these failures are political. This is not to say that external factors, beyond the control of the Polish leadership, such as change of the economic climate in the West or weather conditions, did not play any role; but contrary to the old leadership's attempts to explain up to the last moment almost everything by outside factors, it seems clear that these factors were only of secondary importance.

In 1976 the government tried to raise prices which produced a hostile reaction from workers in various parts of Poland. How is it that such a situation exists where, although on economic grounds the case for an increase in prices and a change in the price structure is clearly there, it's been impossible to persuade the workers of the necessity for it? How did the government find itself so out of touch with the mood of the workers with all their sources of information assuring them that it was possible to carry out price increases without any difficulties?

It is much easier to start with the second part of the question which contains — rightly so — the suggestion of a very high degree of alienation of the leadership from the people. When Gierek came to power he promised consultations, and maybe he even formally kept his promise, for instance installing a 'hot' telephone line from major industrial establishments directly to his office. But the trouble is that real contact with people is in the first place a political and not a technical problem. Without creating true conditions of freedom of speech and association the information channels get stuck — you hear only what you like to hear. In a sense the rejection of government policies in 1976 could be regarded as a greater defeat for the party than in 1970 because in 1970 the revolt came after a period of austerity, whereas in the first half of the 1970s incomes increased considerably. If people rebelled at the first sign of reversal this meant that the true relationships between the rulers and the ruled had not changed, that the workers didn't regard themselves as co-owners of the means of production, but rather as hired hands who complied as long as they were properly paid and could find the goods in the shops. Nothing has improved in this respect since the end of 1970: the electoral system remained as it was before, the trade unions were as fictitiously representative, the leaders spontaneously emerging during the Baltic coast strikes somehow disappeared (kicked either out or up . . .), propaganda concentrated exclusively on successes.

What seems remarkable is that the character of the whole working class movement we've seen this summer has been a challenge to many of these structural distortions in Polish society. The breadth of the movement, the sweep of its demands, the support amongst the population at large have extended it way beyond a normal strike situation or ordinary strike action.

I agree with you fully. The degree of maturity of the strikers in their dignified and disciplined behaviour, and the degree of maturity of demands — affecting the roots of the misfunctioning of the system — have been remarkable indeed.

How much do you feel that the working class had learnt from previous upheavals both with regard to demands to present and the tactics with which to pursue them?

I think that the decisive factor is its own experience, the negative experience which we have discussed earlier. Then there is another factor which should not be overlooked, namely the effect of the persistent activities of the dissident movement in the course of the last 4-5 years. This is particularly true of the dissident group which focused its attention on the working class, the original name of which was the 'Committee for the Defence of the Workers' (KOR). They sided truly with the workers and did an enormously important job in showing by their own example that people are not helpless, by

there is quite a tradition of militancy against oppressive state power in Poland.

disseminating information, by discussing day-to-day industrial problems in a broader context etc.

That unity between the workers and intellectuals is very much a novel development; it's something that eludes the socialist forces in the West. How has it been able to come about in Poland?

This is also the result of the intellectuals' own experience. They have realised that no major problems of intellectual life or for that matter national life stand a chance of being resolved without joining forces with the workers who represent genuine social power. In 1968 the non-conformist groups of students and intelligentsia were easily defeated because of lack of support from the workers, many of whom let themselves be deceived, amongst other things, by the anti-semitic

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campaign. In 1970 the Baltic coast workers had to face the guns alone: the intelligentsia remained passive. In 1975-76 things started to change, and particularly after the 1976 demonstrations workers who were detained and in many cases given harsh sentences met with genuine and effective help from the people — many, but not all of them intellectuals — who organised themselves into the KOR (later renamed the Committee for Public Self-Defence). Under pressure, the participants of the 1976 demonstrations were released; acts of injustice and harassment came to be monitored and exposed; uncensored publications spread; independent forms of education started, and so on. One of the most important documents worked out and widely disseminated by the group publishing the paper *Robotnik* ('The Worker') was the Charter of Workers' Rights. All this helped slowly to develop an atmosphere of mutual trust between those dissidents and the most active workers in different parts of the country. When the strikes started, KOR monitored them and informed the public. The highpoint of co-operation between workers and intellectuals came when the Gdansk strike committee enlisted intellectual help in negotiations (the group of experts), and before signing the agreement demanded — successfully — the release of all KOR members and activists detained by the police. Of course, we should not exaggerate the scale of co-operation (this was only the beginning) and the more so the role of this factor — but in view of the wider implications I thought it worthwhile to broaden slightly the answer.

> real contact with the people is in the first place a political and not a technical problem.

There seemed as well as a learning from experience to be very much a creative dimension in some of the tactics that were employed during the disputes.

I agrée, although this was in part mostly a more consistent application of the tactics used before (occupation of the shipyards, transmission of the negotiations through loudspeakers etc). The main new element compared with 1970 was that the strikers and their leaders were not satisfied with general promises, but demanded concrete commitments and institutional guarantees. The latter — including the right to form independent trade unions — are of course hardly foolproof if not backed by working class power.

In addition there were demands for measures challenging privileges within Polish society — privileges for party officials, for sections of the military and the police. How strong is the feeling on those questions?

The feeling is very strong, but so was it in 1956 when the special shops ('behind the yellow curtains', as they were called) were first considerably restrained only to return a few years later. What will happen this time depends on general developments. I should like to stress that the question of privileged access to goods and services is by no means a Polish specialty. It is in a sense a symbol of moral demise in all East European countries. I would even hesitate to say whether Poland is on or near the top of the list. Clearly in Poland the workers have made an issue out of it, and this may at least help to expose the most flagrant abuses.

It is clear that the majority of the Polish party leadership decided to negotiate with the Gdansk strikers and come to an agreement which accepted many of the demands which had been presented by the workforce.

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There have been disputes around that time and subsequently where workers throughout Poland have been seeking to ensure that that agreement would apply to them as well. What do you think that agreement's chances are of helping to regenerate Polish society and overcome some of the problems that we've been discussing?

Everybody assumes that there were differences within the previous leadership as to how to react to the workers' demands. I wish I knew what the actual positions were, because — so far — nothing has been made public, which by itself is noteworthy. But the main thing was that the entire leadership seemed not to have a clear view and reacted to events, reluctantly yielding to pressure. This was happening during the Baltic strike and also after signing the agreements: it was only when the Silesian miners struck that an unequivocal statement was made that the Gdansk-Szczecin protocols apply nationwide. This kind of ambiguity and reluctant acceptance only under pressure doesn't augur particularly well for the future.

I must be more specific. Most people in Poland seem to admire the results of the 'Polish summer', although there are certainly some who deplore them. But whether admirers or adversaries, everybody has to admit that the economic situation of the country is extremely serious. No one should expect a sudden shower of goods in the market. There are, of course, possibilities to switch resources and to alleviate the situation here and there; there are some prospects of help from abroad. Nevertheless, the months, and perhaps years, ahead will be difficult — maybe not necessarily a deterioration in general living standards, but hardly an improvement. The commitments undertaken by the government in the agreements with the striking workers represent an additional claim on resources which can be recouped, even with a surplus, provided productivity and efficiency increase appropriately. All this calls for a decisive change of attitude by the working population to the state and state-owned economy, and this in turn is conditioned by the perception of how deep and how genuine the expected transformations, especially in the political sphere, are. In 1956, after the return of Gomulka to power, something of this sort emerged, people believed in socialist renewal and were prepared to accept sacrifices. If the new party leadership continues to create an impression that what it does voluntarily is to change only as little as possible, and that it goes further only under pressure — an atmosphere of hope and hence active participation can hardly be envisaged. Some would say there is no other way because they may be afraid of developments getting out of control, some would point to external constraints — but whatever the reasons and whatever the evaluations this is a genuine contradiction which may weigh heavily on the evolving situation.

Doesn't the present economic crisis also increase the need for a new economic reform?

Yes, certainly. An economic reform which would decentralise a number of economic decisions and introduce a regulated market mechanism into the system of planned economy seems indispensable if greater efficiency is to be achieved. It should create mechanisms stimulating better adjustment of output to demand and increased productivity. If successful, it should therefore introduce a higher degree of discipline in the process of production, not by administrative but by economic methods. There are many conditions for the successful introduction of such a reform — economic and political. The latter include co-operation between enterprise-management and the workforce with regard to the basic choices affecting production and the distribution of results. In other words — it requires workers' participation in management. In 1956 such participation was one of the main demands of the workers who in many cases spontaneously created workers' councils in enterprises. Now this type of demand is almost non-existent, at least nothing is heard of it. The main point now is about independent trade unions, that is to say about institutionalised bargaining power. Surely this must be a reflection of disillusionment with the spurious forms of co-management which were promoted by the authorities for the sake of rubber-stamping their own decisions. Should this remain unaltered and the 'them' and 'us' attitudes hardened, the prospects of an effective economic reform and gradual solution to the present economic crisis will remain bleak indeed. I emphasise again that there are many other problems connected with the economic reform.

> the workers didn't regard themselves as co-owners of the means of production, but rather as hired hands

How far do you think that forms of political pluralism will develop in Poland? Clearly the very admission of independent trade unions is a form of pluralism — but how do you think that they will develop in a political sense? And how do you react to the arguments that you are going to have catholic trade unions in Poland and they will also be a source of political opposition?

There is no question that the institution of independent trade unions is in itself a major element towards political pluralism. We must not view political pluralism as a western type multi-party system only. In a sense the position acquired by the Catholic Church in Poland is another sign of pluralism, although the Church is not directly political. It seems practically inevitable that in a more free atmosphere some other institutions, hitherto insignificant from this point of view,

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may start to play a greater role; I have in mind in the first place political parties such as the Peasant (Populist) Party or the Democratic Party which previously were nothing more than poorly disguised extensions of the Polish United Workers' (Communist) Party. No one expects today in Poland unlimited pluralisation of political life; the fundamentals of the existing structure have been recognised in the agreements signed by the workers' representatives. However, the new party leadership will have to learn how to live with institutions which are not simply subordinates, which have to be treated as partners, whom you don't command but negotiate with. I am sure there are people, influential people, not only in East Germany and in the Soviet Union, but in Poland itself who will resent this. The real question is: what is the alternative?

Now, about the socialist nature of the Polish workers' movement as it manifests itself in the light of the 'Polish summer'. I don't want to avoid the problem by arguing that everything depends on the interpretation of the term. Let's face it: comparing (again!) the present situation with that of 1956, I think that socialist attitudes are weaker now. Then many were prepared to accept that Stalinism was an aberration and by getting rid of it the true properties of socialism would be released. But today, quarter of a century after the official condemnation of Stalinism and with the experience of two generations of post-Stalinist leaderships none of whom could be accused of bad intentions but both of whom brought about grave crises, should it come as a surprise that many more people think that it is the system — proudly called 'existing socialism' — which generates all over again the same phenomena? There is only one avenue to counter this: the avenue of practice.

Would you go as far as Kolakowski and say that Marxism in Poland today is a dead issue?

I am not in the business of issuing death-certificates. To my knowledge, however — officialdom, of course, apart — there are very few people in Poland who would call themselves Marxists.

Given the extent of the discrediting of Marxism and socialism as a result of what has happened — what are the chances for their revival in Poland?

I just mentioned the basic conditions of such a revival. What are the chances — this is tantamount to asking not only what are the chances of overcoming the crisis in Poland, but what are the chances of transformations in other socialist countries, including China, and even what are the positive socialist examples in the West. Of course, one's own experience ranks highest, but the wider context is very important, though it goes beyond the scope of our conversation today.

Can we delve back to the question of the new trade unions because it is the main structural reform that appears to have come out of the agreement and it's an important new development. The question of establishing new union organisations is never an easy task. Clearly while there's considerable popular support for it at the present time, I think that its consolidation will pose difficulties. What prospects do you see for these new unions and what are the problems in relation to the existing trade union structure? Is there potential for conflict between the two?

To establish the new trade unions as viable organisations is very difficult even apart from political obstacles discussed earlier. The euphoria of the strike and of the first few days passes quickly and people who have not been professional functionaries (and don't want to become ones . . .) are faced with tedious day-to-day problems. In Poland, as in most other East European countries, trade unions fulfil also an important function of channelling many welfare benefits; this is sometimes used against the new trade unions members (and prospective members) who are threatened that they will lose some of the benefits. Then, when parallel unions start to operate, there will be a question of a division of responsibility in this area. On the other hand the emergence of the new unions will radicalise the old ones. I can't claim full competence in these detailed matters, so let's sum up by saying that there are plenty of obstacles, but the new trade unions are now a fact of life in Poland.

> the question of privileged access to goods and services is by no means a Polish speciality. It is in a sense a symbol of moral demise in all East European countries.

Can we now turn to a question that we haven't really dealt with yet and that is the question of the Catholic Church in Poland at the present time. How would you assess its role?

Again I am not an expert in church matters, but as a student of the overall changes on the socio-economic and political scene let me note a seeming paradox which truly deserves a Marxist analysis: as a result of communist rule in Poland, the Catholic Church has substantially enhanced its status and influence. The vast majority of Poles are devout Catholics, this is true; but in the past it was equally true that religious attitudes did not go hand in hand with support for the Church as an institution. There was a significant strain of anti-clericalism not only among the intellectuals and the working class under socialist or communist influence, but also among the peasants dominated by the populist political movement. This has largely gone now. Why? Among other things, because the social position of the Church has changed: in the past the Church was seen (in many cases rightly so) as an ally of the property-owning classes (and a large property-owner itself); today — with the disappearance of the old social order and the Church's own wealth — this source of anti-clericalism has lost its validity. Now, there is an increasing feeling that

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— against the background of political and ideological frustrations which we have discussed earlier — the Church emerges as an institution of moral integrity which offers values less liable to disillusionment . . . This is linked with the Church's civic independence, in a sense preserved even under Stalinism, and recently more pronounced — also in sheltering and helping independent initiatives in public life,

the Church emerges as an institution of moral integrity which offers values less liable to disillusionment

the workers' movement in the first place. Last but not least comes the image of the Church as a guardian and symbol of national sovereignty — a major issue for the Poles not only in the past but in the present as well. All this must be taken into account by anybody who wants to understand real social relations and not to delude himself with abstract clichés. We should not, however, fall into the opposite extreme and regard the Church's influence as limitless: when the Polish primate, Cardinal Wyszynski, in the midst of the August strikes delivered a sermon which was widely regarded as excessively conciliatory (and extensively publicised by all media, including the party press), it went unheeded despite the fact that it came from the holiest of Polish shrines; very soon a sort of self-criticism followed . . .

How far do you think these events in Poland have had an effect on the membership of the Communist Party — the Polish United Workers' Party? Is there any possibility that you would foresee of transformations taking place in the party ultimately along the same lines as we saw in Czechoslovakia in 1968?

There is certainly a big debate going on within the party organisations — the members say things which they would have never dared to say a few weeks ago. As usual in such times, things which were branded officially as inventions of the 'enemies of socialism' get corroboration from the Party's own ranks; what is more, cases of overzealousness are quite frequent — bandwaggon-jumping . . . However, so far, criticism is directed exclusively at the past. I am not aware of a single critical reference to the present policies, for example to the methods of handling the issue of new trade unions — either way. There are also signs of factional manoeuvres. All this is a far cry from what was happening in the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1968, when determined forces of socialist renewal emerged within the party leadership carrying along the vast majority of the population.

So you think that pragmatism will continue to be the guiding principle here?

This looks so — with all the implications mentioned before. There is nothing, so far, which would point to a possibility of producing something similar to the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of April 1968. Let me say in this context that I regard the suppression of the Czechoslovak Spring as a terrible tragedy for the socialist movement, and the choking impact of this suppression is growing and not diminishing over time. If such a peaceful, orderly, communist-led attempt (quite unlike 1956 Hungary in these respects) proved futile, what are the prospects?

There is a lot of international concern and attention in relation to Poland. The outcome will affect developments in Eastern Europe and the prospects for détente. What do you think is likely to be the attitude of the Soviet government and party to developments in Poland?

So far, the attitude seems to be that of grave resentment. What kind of practical steps are taken to push things back to 'normal' is hard to say, but that such efforts will be made seems rather certain. Western commentators discuss this question almost exclusively from the point of view of a Soviet invasion. Let's assume however that the Soviet government realises the unpredictably high cost of invasion (repetition of the Czechoslovak 1968 circumstances is hardly probable — not necessarily open military resistance, but at least a general strike would be most likely); let's assume further that there is an awareness that an invasion wouldn't solve anything (chances of successful Husak-type normalisation are negligible, to say the least). Thus, what would be tried under the circumstances is pressure on the Polish leadership to minimise the 'concessions' and prevent in this way the 'disease' from spreading to other countries some of whom face similar social and economic problems but, so far, have proved better equipped to keep them under the surface. Such a policy would converge with the interests of a substantial part of the Polish establishment itself (with the outside threat used — as tried before the agreements — as a convenient tool); it might even be successful by its own criteria, but from a broader point of view, as should be clear from our entire conversation, it could bring only another failure.

How do you think the working class movement in Britain and other parts of Europe can best demonstrate solidarity with the movement in Poland?

The immediate reaction should be that of solidarity with the popular struggle, support for the new workers' organisations and for attempts at overcoming the crisis by embarking upon a long-term road of genuine political change. There are also ideological implications very relevant in my view for the future of socialism in the West. I have here in mind the necessity to drop clichés and particularly to stop thinking of the working class as an abstract sociological category far removed from what real workers are. One of the corollaries is not to divide a genuine working class movement into 'progressive' and 'reactionary' according to one's own arbitrary ideological criteria.

Finally can we just ask you whether you feel that the events of the last few months in Poland should make us feel optimistic about the evolution of socialist countries in general?

It depends how one understands the terms 'optimism' and 'socialist evolution'. The Polish events are a source of optimism in the sense that they have shown that people in general, and the industrial workers in particular, can find the moral strength and solidarity to protest against what is being presented to them under the name of socialism — despite all the intimidation and indoctrination. The Polish events are a source of optimism in the sense that they have shown the power of the working class which ultimately should become the decisive factor of development toward democratic socialism. If, however, you ask me whether I am optimistic in assessing the chances of the 'Polish summer' in being directly successful in democratic

not to divide a genuine working class movement into 'progressive' and 'reactionary' according to one's own arbitrary ideological criteria.

socialist terms — I am rather not. I am afraid that the weight of outside pressure combined with domestic vested interests may prove too much for allowing the most complex internal problems to be solved in an appropriate way. However, one's predictions luckily do not always come true, and apart from this, things never return to what they were in the past. □

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Andrew Gamble

Thatcher - make or break

The outcome of the Thatcher experiment remains open. Nothing has yet been decided.

Eighteen months have passed since the Conservatives regained office in May 1979, winning an election victory that was decisive in terms of seats but narrow in terms of votes. It failed to bring a major recovery of support for the Conservatives in the north of Britain, and was certainly no popular landslide.[1] Like many governments since the war the new Conservative Government enjoyed the support of only one third of the electorate and less than half of the voters. Yet whatever the electoral arithmetic and in marked contrast to the behaviour of Labour administrations, the Conservatives have set about the implementation of their partisan programme with great vigour, enthusiasm and confidence. In the eyes of the cabal of economic ministers who are planning and carrying out the strategy, and in the eyes of many on the Left[2], a political watershed has been passed, a decisive break with the social democratic consensus which has shifted the whole terrain of politics in Britain to the right. This has struck many foreign socialists also. According to Göran Therborn[3] Britain now has the most reactionary government in Europe. This article will attempt to assess how great a watershed has in fact been crossed.

Thatcherism has become a term of considerable power. Not only has it come to stand for a particular approach to managing the economy, and reorganising the public sector, but it has attempted and to some extent has succeeded in connecting this approach with popular resentment against bureaucracy, against the trade unions and against high personal taxation. Many of those who have discussed Thatcherism in this journal have singled out as its most important feature this ability to attack the basic positions of social democracy by basing itself on the manner in which workers experience the institutions social democracy has created. The apparent ease with which this has been done, and the state of siege and ideological encirclement which many in the trade unions and in the public sector now feel, has created deep pessimism on the Left about the prospects for resisting this onslaught.

But there is a danger in attributing too much consistency and too much power to Thatcherism. Working class support for the Conservatives is not new. No Conservative government could ever have held office without it, and Thatcher has not succeeded in enlarging the Conservative working class vote, nor has she yet demonstrated a capacity to hold the support she has attracted. The reason for the political shock the Left has experienced and its creeping unease about Thatcherism, is because Thatcherism represents a clearcut repudiation of social democracy. Thatcher has openly declared what the last Labour government only practised. Thatcherism proclaims the erosion of the gains of social democracy not as something regrettable that has been imposed by the facts of Britain's relative economic decline and the world recession, but as a positive feature, something to be welcomed and encouraged. What panics the Left is the knowledge they have gained from years of struggling against social democracy that much of it is indefensible. What the Left had not realised was how vulnerable it was to attack from the right.

Thatcher has openly declared what the last Labour government only practised.

THATCHERISM AS DOCTRINE

The key propositions of Thatcherism are now well known.

(1) The public sector is an unproductive burden on the wealth creating sector in general and on taxpayers in particular. From this follows the need to drastically reduce public expenditure and to return as many services in the public sector as possible to the market and to the family. The aim is firstly to prevent the real cost of public services rising at a time when output and productivity are stagnant or falling. But it is also to permit the kind of tax cuts that are intended both to secure the party's electoral support and to encourage the revival of private enterprise, the regeneration of the capitalist class, and to restore family and individual responsibility.

(2) The chief aim of government economic policy should be maintaining price stability by firm control of the money supply. This is because control of the money supply is believed (though many economists doubt it and recent events belie it) to be the one thing that governments actually can control in a capitalist economy. The money supply can be controlled if governments steadily reduce their borrowing, so removing any temptation to resort to the printing press to increase revenue, and if government sets monetary targets and controls the volume of private credit in line with them. To believe that governments can and should control the money supply means believing that governments are directly responsible for whatever rate of inflation exists. Wage demands by trade unions, according to monetarist doctrine, do not by themselves raise or lower the rate of inflation, so incomes policies and the involvement of unions in discussions about general economic policy are entirely unnecessary. But trade unions are directly responsible for the level of unemployment if they insist on a level of real wages which firms cannot pay. Trade unions are also responsible for stagnation and a slow rate of growth to the extent that they are capable of resisting rationalisation and reorganisation of the labour process aimed at raising productivity. The effects of high unemployment and stagnant or falling living standards can create political pressures for an expansion of money supply which governments find hard to resist. If they give in to them higher rates of inflation will result, which will indirectly be the consequence of trade union action. But it is the key doctrine of monetarism that government efforts to realise a higher level of employment or a faster rate of growth by expanding demand (the mainstream Keynesian prescription) is doomed to failure because of the existence of a 'natural' rate of unemployment and a 'natural' rate of growth. These are determined not by the level of demand but by the institutional organisation of markets. Expanding demand can only raise the rate of inflation.

(3) The role of government in the economy should accordingly be confined to maintaining the conditions for markets to function properly. Stable money is one such condition, security of property and enforceability of contracts are others. In addition governments

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have the duty to intervene to remove any obstacles which prevent markets functioning properly. Taken together these tasks do not imply a small role for government or a non-interventionist role. On the contrary it signifies not a withdrawal but a redirection of state energies and goals, and constant vigilance to maintain and extend the market order.

THATCHER AND HEATH

How far do these doctrines and the strategy which is based upon them represent a break with the strategies employed by Conservative governments in the past, and in particular by the Heath government? There are certain undeniable resemblances between the two. Both the Heath and Thatcher administrations presented programmes which ostensibly broke with central priorities of the social democratic consensus. Both followed periods of ineffectual Labour government and intense internal ideological ferment directed against social democracy. Both began with aggression and confidence. The Heath government proclaimed a withdrawal from intervention, it ended assistance to lame ducks, it conducted a selective massacre of the quangos, it committed itself to reducing public expenditure and proposed a series of new charges on public services, and it put forward a wide-ranging programme of trade union reform.

But these similarities should not blind us to the essential differences. Although Heath's policy appeared at the time to mark a break with social democracy, in retrospect it can be seen as a last attempt to operate within its confines. The Heath government sought to put British capitalism on a new course, to arrest national economic decline, and make British companies competitive within the EEC. Heath's competition policy was an attempt to overcome the specific competitive weaknesses of British capital. The means tried at first were certainly influenced by the new current of social market thinking, but once these failed to produce faster growth because of the scale of unemployment and working class resistance they created, the Government made significant changes in its policies (the so-called U-turns), and opted instead for statutory wage controls, increased public expenditure and much greater intervention in industry. The basic aim remained the same — achieving a higher rate of growth in the British economy. Faster growth was seen as indispensable to enable British capital to succeed in the EEC, to ease the problems of funding the public sector, and to restore the Conservatives' reputation for successful economic management to which their electoral fortunes since the war had become so closely linked.

Changed circumstances

The Thatcher government is operating in very different circumstances. The world recession has changed the framework of political calculation. Since growth in the world economy can no longer be assumed, the whole basis of social democratic politics — increasing public provision and a measure of redistribution financed out of steadily expanding output — has been undermined. The recession has at the same time made the relative decline of the British economy potentially catastrophic. British capitalism is now the weakest national capitalism amongst the developed capitalist states. In the last world recession in the 1930s it was one of the strongest, and did not suffer the worst effects. The loss of empire is only partly offset by the good fortune of North Sea oil.

One consequence of Britain's deteriorating economic position has been that a significant section of the Conservative leadership has now broken with social democratic politics. They do not believe social democracy can be resuscitated nor do they wish it to be. They disagree on how fast and how far the party should proceed in dismantling it. This is the reason for a remarkable paradox. The Heath government, committed to making social democracy work, was prepared to take greater political risks and pursue more radical policies than the Thatcher government has yet shown itself willing to do. The Thatcher government has proceeded cautiously, particularly as regards trade union reform. But although it is more cautious there is also much less chance that it will indulge in the kind of U-turns the Heath government performed. This is because those kinds of U-turns could only be performed by a government still committed to the social democratic goals of full employment and growth. The Heath leadership flirted with the doctrines of the social market economy as techniques for improving efficiency and raising growth. Since they were only seen as techniques they could always be changed. For Thatcher and her cabal of economic ministers (Howe, Joseph, Biffen, Nott, and Lawson) they are not techniques but principles.

The resolve of the Thatcher government is much more solid because clear alternatives are so much less evident. A majority of the present cabinet almost certainly believes that the present strategy will fail. But they are also convinced that the strategy will have to be seen to fail comprehensively before a major change is possible. The confidence of Tory leaders in their traditional governing style of pragmatism, compromise and flexibility has temporarily left them, as a result of the seriousness of the plight of the national economy and the precariousness of their own party's electoral fortunes. If Thatcherism were to succeed in restabilising the economy, shifting the political balance permanently and creating a new and broader working class constituency for the Conservatives, the bulk of the present leadership reared amidst the constraints and procedures of social democratic politics would speedily adapt to ruling in the new set of circumstances. On this basis Thatcherism is seen as worth exploring and supporting for a while. But some of Thatcher's Conservative critics still fear that a resort by the Conservatives to doctrinal and partisan politics and an explicit reopening of long settled class questions risks a similar response from the Left, and a dangerous polarisation between the two main parties in a political system which outwardly is characterised by the elaborate rituals of adversary politics, but inwardly relies upon a fundamental consensus derived from the institutional continuity of the state and the acceptance of both party leaderships when in government of the national interest as it is perceived and defined by these permanent agencies.

THATCHERISM AND CONSERVATISM

In one sense at least Thatcherism is very alien to Conservative traditions — its acceptance of certain of the doctrines of liberal political economy as a guide and standard for its policies. This supreme old bourgeois party always took pride in distancing itself from the most characteristic expression of bourgeois ideology. The Conservatives presented themselves as the party of the national economy and the state, the party of the community rather than the market, the party of protection, imperialism, paternalism, and intervention, not the party of free trade, cosmopolitanism, self-help, and laissez-faire. Tory hostility to liberal political economy was pronounced, particularly because it promoted individualism and questioned the authority of established institutions, and encouraged selfishness and competition between individuals and classes. The Conservatives believed that there were some things worth dying in the last ditch for — the Union of the United Kingdom and the rights of property being two — but the preservation of an egalitarian and

[1] Paul Olive's points are important and do in some ways qualify the picture I drew of the weakening of Conservative electoral support in my previous article. *Marxism Today*, May 1980.

[2] See Stuart Hall, *Marxism Today*, February 1980.

[3] *Marxism Today*, April 1980.

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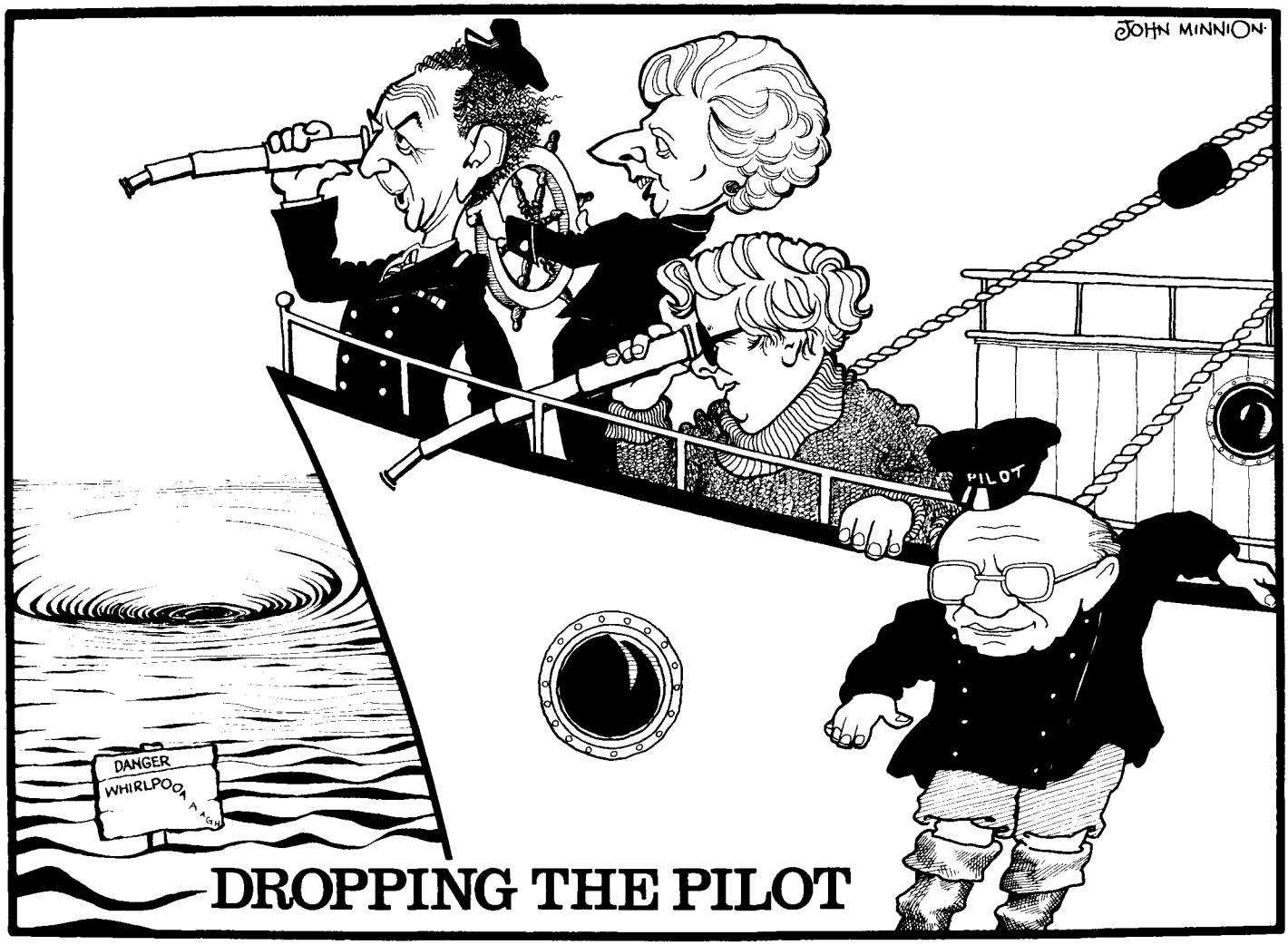
competitive market order was not among them. The Conservatives were always renowned for their hostility to doctrine and their lack of principle. Churchill, who no doubt knew about such things, described the Conservatives in 1906 as 'a party of great vested interests, banded together in a formidable confederation . . . corruption at home, aggression to cover it up abroad; the trickery of tariff juggles, the tyranny of a party machine; sentiment by the bucketful; patriotism by the imperial pint; the open hand at the public exchequer, the open door at the public house; dear food for the million, cheap labour for the millionaire.'

The hostility of Conservatism to liberalism and individualism had to be modified in the 1920s with the breakup of the old Liberal Party and the entry of large numbers of former Liberals, including Churchill himself into the Conservative Party, to the despair of the imperialist and protectionist wing of the party. But although these new elements helped tip the balance of party opinion towards orthodoxy in economic policy it did not mean the implanting of a doctrinal liberal political economy in the party. The Conservatives became the dominant governing party and increasingly the umbrella party for the defence of all the interests of property against the threat posed by the rise of Labour at home and world revolution abroad. This meant that the party accepted the main lines of the foreign economic policy of the British state — the commitment to free trade and the international role of sterling, the recreation of a world liberal economic order, rather than a protectionist and self-sufficient imperial federation. This was accompanied by domestic policies emphasising financial retrenchment. Neither policy involved, however, a crusading commitment to restore and develop the principles of a market order, rather an acceptance of policies that had become orthodoxies and which expressed the enduring facts of Britain's external position and the influence the doctrines of liberal political economy had exercised over economic policy-making for seventy years.

The policies were certainly inflexible and were the immediate cause of the General Strike in 1926 and the financial crisis in 1931. A more flexible policy might have avoided both, especially since neither policy succeeded in their main aim; general wage reduction to make British exports competitive at the new exchange rate were not achieved, and sterling's world dominance was not preserved. Once the gold standard collapsed in 1931 the National government, having purged itself of the few doctrinaire economic liberals like Philip Snowden, imposed a measure of protection and encouraged the formation of cartels and a range of means for reducing competition in the home market because of the depressed state of world demand.

Opposition to protectionism

The revival of political economy which began in the 1960s and which has become steadily more influential in the Conservative Party is different from the liberal conservatism of the 1920s in that it does not reflect an established policy consensus, but on the contrary seeks to break with established policies and challenge the essential assumptions and priorities of economic management which social democracy and Keynesian economics established. One of the most striking features of present British politics is the absence of protectionism in the Conservative Party. This favourite refuge of right-wing parties in the face of world depression and external



DROPPING THE PILOT

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outwardly is characterised by the elaborate rituals of adversary politics, but inwardly relies upon a fundamental consensus

economic challenge holds only the National Front at present in Britain. Some of the most nationalistic British politicians are also those most committed to the social market doctrine and therefore to the standpoint of the world economy and of international capital which it dictates. This reflects in part the far-reaching accommodation and subordination of British strategic and economic interests to those of the United States since 1941, and also the degree to which British capital has been internationalised. A viable protectionist strategy would necessarily attack the interests of the dominant multinational and financial sectors of the British economy. Like many other states Britain no longer has a unified national bourgeoisie and its governments must balance the needs and pressures of the national economy and national electorate on one side with the needs and pressures of international capital on the other.

Pursuing a liberal foreign economic policy has been maintained by all governments in Britain since the war. The new social market doctrine is aimed not at the external policy but the internal policy of economic management. It criticises firstly the techniques of demand management whose purpose is to achieve full employment by smoothing out cycles and raising the rate of growth; secondly, the considerable increase in the volume and range of public expenditure and public involvement at all levels in the economy. Liberal political economy is not a single doctrine, and Thatcherism represents a specific combination of its key elements — the family, economy and state. The emphasis of Thatcherism upon a free economy, an unfettered market order is what has attracted most comment and which appears most at variance with traditional Conservative ideology. But the other terms of the trinity are interpreted in ways which are much more closely linked to traditional Conservative ideological concerns. All versions of liberal political economy prescribe a strong state, able to establish the highly artificial conditions of a market order, but whereas a strong state can also be a minimal state, Thatcherism seeks a greater not a smaller role for the agencies charged with internal security and external defence. The state is to be rolled back in some areas and rolled forward in others. Similarly Thatcherism does not seek to reduce but to enlarge the scope of the family. Its emphasis upon family responsibility is accompanied by an emphasis upon family morality and the need for greater discipline and higher moral standards. The real innovation of Thatcherism is the way it has linked traditional Conservative concern with the basis of authority in social institutions and the importance of internal order and external security, with a new emphasis upon free market exchange and the principles of a market order.

THATCHERISM AND THE RULING CLASS

Thatcherism represents less of a radical departure from traditional Conservatism than appears at first sight. Does it nevertheless signal a change in ruling class strategy for handling the crisis? How does it relate to the various options that exist for coping with the effects of decline and recession? The principal options are three, which can be summarised briefly as follows.

(1) *De-industrialisation.* In many ways this is not an option, simply the line of least resistance, the continuation of present policies. It is the necessary consequence of pursuing the kind of deflationary policies which have been in force since 1976. They entail high and rising unemployment, and stagnant or falling output, and the progressive run-down of all those industries unable to compete internationally. A slow demoralisation sets in as factories close and public expenditure is subjected to round after round of cuts. The political effects of high unemployment are contained because it is confined to certain areas, and because some of its effects can be offset by using North Sea oil revenues to maintain unemployment benefit at a sufficient level and strong security forces. At the same time the service sector and the high technology sector of the economy expand, and these together with the multinational and financial sectors earn enough export and rentier incomes to keep a sizable part of the economy afloat. The industrial decline is inexorable and no determined attempt made to reverse it. Trade union membership begins to fall and the unions are outflanked rather than confronted, their rank-and-file demoralised and divided by the deflationary policy. The problem of the strength of the British working class is dealt with by shifting the economy away from those sectors where union strength is greatest. This is at the expense of Britain remaining a major industrial power, but the policy carries least political risk and least challenge to established interests. In particular the openness of the British economy to world trade and world capital is not questioned. What is incalculable is the effect of the world recession and the possibility that de-industrialisation is turned from a slow retreat into a headlong rout.

(2) *Industrial Regeneration I.* The second option is much bolder. It is to use the political opportunity of the present recession to restructure the industrial base of the economy and to confront and materially weaken the power of organised labour. Trade union power is not outflanked but confronted and destroyed. The internal barriers to accumulation are removed:– the ability and willingness of workers to resist changes in work practices and the introduction of new machinery; the tax burden of the state, involving major cutbacks in the collective provision of welfare, health and education. Such policies would mean an open and bitter onslaught on trade unions as independent organisations on a much bigger scale than was attempted by the Heath government. The major risk involved is the likely scale of resistance to direct attacks upon the unions as organisations. The Conservatives have unhappy memories of the last such attempt. A second drawback is that removing the internal obstacles to internal accumulation is no guarantee of success as long as the external obstacles remain.

membership begins to fall and the unions are outflanked rather than confronted

(3) *Industrial Regeneration II.* The third option is the one least canvassed amongst economic policy makers because it involves some sacrifices from capital. Here industrial regeneration would be carried out by a large increase in state involvement in the economy — state investment, planning agreements, and wage controls. They would have to be accompanied by import and foreign exchange controls, as well as a continuation and extension of egalitarian welfare measures, particularly to assist in redeployment of the labour force. This kind of strategy has never been resorted to in Britain except during war, in 1916 and 1940. It involves the suspension of the market in many areas and an attempt to manage the economy through direct collaboration between the classes. Such strategies although often seen in retrospect as being in the long term interests of capital, are rarely in the short-term interests of individual capitals, and so are employed only in conditions of extreme crisis. This is partly because such strategies, although options for the ruling class, are also options for the working class, and their outcome depends on the respective strengths of capital

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and labour. Such strategies provide openings to the Left as well as the Right and can precipitate more radical challenges to the social order.

CAN THATCHERISM WORK?

There is scarcely any need to remark on how distant Thatcherism is from option three. Its relationship to the other two is more complex. In rhetoric and ideology the social market programme is clearly closest to option two. In practice, however, the option the Conservatives inherited was option one, de-industrialisation. This was already well established by May 1979. The Labour government had pioneered monetarism in Britain and was the first administration to set monetary

despite the rhetoric its leaders love to employ the government is still proceeding with caution on many fronts.

targets, introduce cash limits, and the containment of public expenditure, at the same time that it emasculated its own industrial strategy and resisted pressure for import controls. This deflationary policy, which necessarily meant the abandonment of the goal of full employment, was carried through on the basis of formal cooperation between the trade unions and the government, an arrangement not threatened until the government's last winter. The Thatcher government inherited the deflationary policy and has continued it. It has made it more inflexible and rigid, particularly by its insistence on publishing medium term targets for government borrowing and money supply over the next five years, which are intended to tie the government's hands into the future. But the real innovations in economic management were all made under Labour. The main change Thatcher has introduced is no longer to present the deflationary policy as the expression of social democratic consensus between government, capital and labour. On the contrary it has kept the trade unions at arms length.

Two ways of assessing Thatcherism have so far appeared on the Left. The first, which was a strong theme at the recent CSE (Conference of Socialist Economists) Conference finds very little change between the Labour and Conservative administrations. It sees a continuing ruling class strategy, only the tactics being altered by the change of government. The fundamentals remain the same. From this perspective what counts is the struggle against capital, not the struggle against any particular party government. The second, which has been strongly represented in the debate on Thatcherism in this journal, sees Thatcherism as marking a much more distinct break in British politics, the moment of explicit rupture with social democracy, which potentially may shift the balance of forces and the terrain of future political debate and political action. Even if Thatcherism fails, it is argued, the way will have been prepared for a different kind of social democracy in the future.

Much will depend on the manner of Thatcherism's failure, if failure it proves, and how that failure is brought about. It is clear from the first eighteen months that despite the rhetoric its leaders love to employ the government is still proceeding with caution on many fronts. It is still testing what it can do. This means that despite its intentions it has so far failed to embark seriously on option 2; the longer it delays the more unlikely it will be to do so, since problems arising from the deflationary strategy are already accumulating at an alarming rate, and the ascendancy of the social market cabal in the cabinet is not guaranteed permanently.

The two main failures

From its own standpoint the Government has been failing in two major areas. Its proposals for trade union reform are hardly what is required and it has so far failed to cut the overall burden of public expenditure. One of the high priests of social market doctrine, Friedrich Von Hayek, wrote last June to *The Times* from his Freiburg bunker, arguing that the Government had very little time left, and if it was to end inflation without intolerable economic and political effects, a determined attack on union power was essential. He proposed a referendum on the issue of abolishing all the legal immunities granted to the unions this century. This is the kind of measure that would go a considerable way to realising option 2, if it could be implemented. The problem for the Thatcher government is that such an open and comprehensive attack upon the trade unions as organisations would involve the Government, even if it were armed with a referendum victory, in the most massive class confrontation. It would need to be armed with rather more than that. The great attraction of the present deflationary policy is that it involves no such direct attack on the unions as organisations. Instead it weakens the unions through the steady increase in unemployment and the division of interest between employed and unemployed. The problem is that it does not relax union power fast enough to make a general reconstruction and recovery of British capitalism very likely.

A second failing has come over public expenditure. Although this was one of the main planks of its programme public expenditure in total has so far not been reduced, and the Government's targets for public borrowing and money supply have been endangered. The reason is partly because of the settlement of public sector pay claims, but it has more to do firstly with the Government's insistence on reducing direct taxes and increasing spending on defence and the police, and secondly with the marginal character of the cuts in social programmes the Government has been trying to push through.

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Council house sales, higher prescription charges, higher fees for overseas students, the sale of public sector assets — none of these go to the heart of the big public sector spending programmes. What the radical right want are private health insurance, vouchers for education, tolls for all new roads, denationalisation of all the major public enterprises. None of these policies have yet been attempted, and in their absence the Government has found itself embroiled in the familiar problem of how to fund its expenditure. This is particularly difficult because like radical right movements elsewhere, one of the main planks of its popular appeal is its promise to cut taxes. Given its monetarist stance and its commitment to sound finance, the failure to cut public expenditure adequately or to raise taxes sufficiently led directly to the steep rise in interest rates a year ago which helped to boost the pound to new heights on the foreign exchanges, and subjected industry to a much sharper squeeze than was originally intended.

Powell might have created such a movement, but Thatcher has never operated outside the magic circle of the establishment.

The social market cabal is not dismayed by the sharpness of the squeeze since they hope it will assist in changing attitudes to work and productivity more quickly and that it may prove an easier way of weakening union power. But its immediate costs are that unemployment has begun to rise very steeply, putting extra pressure on government spending targets, and investment and profits have collapsed. Although the Government has been encouraged by some local successes in imposing reorganisation on the labour force, most notably at British Leyland, it has been forced to intervene much more than it intended in the economy in order to keep any hopes of an industrial regeneration alive and to prevent a cumulative collapse. This deteriorating condition of the economy is creating increasing problems of electoral management, and will only be tolerable if the recession does bottom out and recovery starts. But that depends a great deal on what happens to the world economy — something quite outside the British government's control. In the meantime the Government has so far failed in terms of social market doctrine to do enough to lay the foundations for a British industrial recovery should world conditions improve, because it has not acted decisively either over the trade unions or over public expenditure.

If the Government was assured of a decade in office it might be able to afford to proceed gradually. The electoral constraint is a real one because it imposes the need to get the economy right within five years. If they fail the Conservatives risk the return of a Labour Party to office, its links with the trade unions re-affirmed, and though unlikely to implement the alternative economic strategy, ready to reverse many of the policies to which the Conservatives attach great importance.

The political interests of the ruling class

What is really in the political interests of the ruling class at present is that the Labour Party should split and a major political re-alignment take place across all three major parties, in order to guarantee continuous centre government. The means of achieving this would be proportional representation and a complete overhauling of the antiquated British political system. Such a course is anathema to the Thatcher leadership since it would spell the end of its own peculiar brand of right wing politics. This is another reason why the Government is likely to prove cautious. The problem with Thatcherism as a radical instrument of government is that it is not rooted in a genuine mass anti-state movement. Its perspectives are those of the existing permanent agencies of the state apparatus. The scope for a radical bourgeois party in Britain is considerable, but it would mean the kind of reform of all the major institutions in civil society, the creation of a much more open, meritocratic, egalitarian and technocratic and less militaristic society, to which the Conservatives as the natural party of all the antiquated institutions of the British state and British civil society have always been deeply opposed. Powell might have created such a movement, but Thatcher has never operated outside the magic circle of the establishment.

The arrival of the Thatcher government in office has marked the moment that the break with social democratic politics is explicitly acknowledged. The deflationary strategy which can only lead to a shrinking industrial base is now justified no longer as an expedient and temporary tactic, but the only possible course of action for restoring prosperity. But like the Labour government before it this Conservative government has so far failed to take the more radical measures which seem certain to be needed to restore the British economy as a major site for the accumulation of capital. This failure casts a long shadow over the Thatcher experiment, and makes its eventual failure more probable. If it should fail, it is certainly possible that it may be followed by a government which continues the same policies and for which Thatcherism has prepared the ground. But it is also possible that it may create new opportunities for the Left. Nothing has been decided yet. The outcomes of the Thatcher experiment are open and what ensues will partly depend on what kind of resistance is mounted to Thatcher's policies now. □

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Richard Hill

Architecture: the past fights back

Architects used to be stock figures of romantic fiction, combining the respectability of the professional man with the glamour of the art school. They were also heroes of the welfare state, devising the buildings and images appropriate to the post-war society

The public expected sex-appeal and social concern, technical competence and artistic exuberance. When it became clear that these ideals were not, and probably could not be, realised in a profession of about 26,000 moderately competent middle-class men (and about 2,000 women), the public's rejection was swift and severe. The architect today hardly exists as a separate image in people's minds. One half has shifted to that of 'the planner', the stock figure of local government bureaucracy, constantly interfering, achieving little and that generally negative. The other half has shifted to that of a developer's lap dog, a man unrolling drawings of yet more banal and ugly office buildings in front of a smug financier.

These familiar images are useful rough and ready indicators of how the relation between architectural practice and society has changed, but they still beg a lot of questions. Most importantly they accept a limited definition of architecture and so make a general understanding of its change and significance difficult. Architecture is not just what architects do. An army of other experts and professionals — engineers, surveyors, quantity surveyors — is now indispensable to the production of designs for buildings. In any case a sizable proportion of buildings is designed by builders, surveyors, draughtsmen, with no architect in sight. But more important than this is that architecture is more than just the sum of the intentions of designers and specialists expressed in the form of drawings, contracts, specifications and schedules. The only useful definition, although a very broad one, is that architecture concerns the relationship between buildings and people. Some questions, the strength of structures or the qualities of materials for instance, can be dealt with as specialisms if they are taken as isolated aspects of inanimate buildings. The use that people make of buildings however is an architectural issue. Also, because people cannot avoid seeing even buildings which they do not use, their everyday experiences in the street are an architectural issue. Given this, architecture is surely too serious to leave to be dominated by any body of experts. It is easy to draw this conclusion, but much more difficult to set out a way of understanding and analysing architecture which can become public property. If anything, discusson about architecture among experts and professionals is becoming more, not less, obscure and inturned. Given this obscurity about what the issues are in architectural debates, people become increasingly diffident about their own feelings towards buildings. Can it really be right that so many buildings seem to them patently ugly and inconvenient to use? Or are they themselves in the wrong because they don't understand what the designer is trying to do? The first problem that needs to be tackled therefore is to outline the scope of architecture, to suggest a basic agenda of the questions that should become public property, to boost people's confidence so that they can argue about architecture.

A daily issue

People are right to worry about architecture. It has a profound effect on everyday life. At the extreme architecture can be a matter of life and death and very commonly a matter of health and physical well-being. In the winter months cold can kill people inside their homes. This can be seen as a 'social policy' problem: old people, and numbers of young families are particular groups too poor to afford the proper amount of heating fuel. It can, and should, be seen as an architectural problem. Such people typically live in draughty uninsulated homes with ancient or inefficient or inappropriate heating systems. They would be as well advised to wrap up warm and live in a tent. Many hundreds of thousands of families live in houses where dampness is a constant hazard to health. This can be seen as a 'social policy' problem: if they spent a lot more on fuel and less on food they could waste enough heat to keep the dampness at bay. But it is also an architectural problem. Even new housing in Britian has the lowest insulation standards of any country with a comparable climate. Whenever housing standards have been discussed and formulated in Britain, the kind of heating system and insulation standards to be used have been footnotes. Performance has always been sacrificed to economy. Even the minimal 'Parker Morris' heating standards will soon be dropped as basic requirements in new council housing, raising the possibility that some authorities will take a step backward in this most vital architectural standard.

Having the right attitude to standards will not wish away all the problems in a sphere, like heating, which is dominated by health and basic comfort considerations. Although it presents no basic scientific challenge, it does, like many cases where engineering products come into consumer use, raise issues of reliability, simplicity of operation, economy and unobtrusiveness. But in the last analysis the requirements of such a system can at least be measured in physical terms: temperature, humidity, air movement. Much more typical of architectural work are questions where important issues of comfort and convenience in daily life are involved but where there are no clearly measurable criteria. The objectives are socially defined and impossible to articulate in the abstract. How can you measure the convenience of the arrangement of rooms in a house? Presented with a number of different examples most people could say which they preferred and why. It would be virtually impossible to get the various factors weighted against each other as abstract lists: is a square living room worth five points to a narrow room's ten? Is a sink with a view on the garden worth five points or fifty points? Clearly such an approach would be meaningless since in any given house all the factors affect one another in a unique manner. The complexity of these sorts of problems has tended to produce two extreme reactions around which discussion in the architectural profession has focused.

Standardisation — and no trimmings

The first kind of reaction is to try and systematise and simplify, to create a set of measurable criteria against all the odds. Since only crude features can be systematised in this way — for instance types of house plans can be sorted into hierarchies of shapes and sizes and basic arrangements of rooms —

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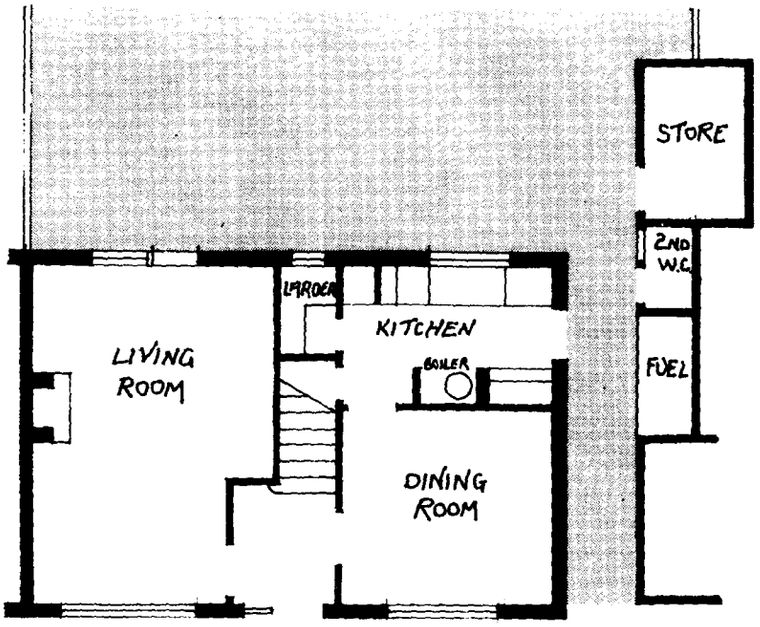
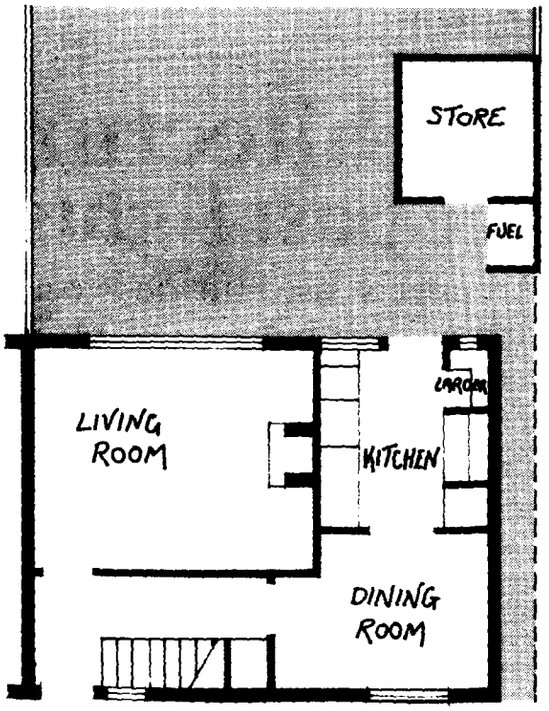


Ground floor plan of a typical 1949 standard council house (5 person).
Total area of house including storage: 1031sq ft.

Figure 1



Ground floor plan of a typical 1952 standard council house (5 person).
Total area of house including storage: 921sq ft.
The most obvious differences from the 1949 house are: no second downstairs WC, no hot water boiler, smaller larder, no pram space, smaller living room and dining room, narrower plot and hence smaller garden.

there is a great danger of exaggerating the importance of a few features to the detriment of all aspects of the design problem. This can lead, quite unexpectedly perhaps, into a buttressing of mean and backward-looking social policies. For instance it is a frequent cry that, given the seriousness of the housing problem it must be worth producing 'basic' houses with 'no trimmings' on the assumption that these will be at least better than no house at all, or a miserably cramped or badly-equipped one. So, the argument goes, it is worthwhile making the insides of houses cheaper, cramming the houses closer together, cutting out some of the heating, because what *really* matters is to provide four walls and a roof with some internal walls for reasons of modesty. The argument is pursued with predictable zeal when the strategic question of economising on state subsidies to council housing is on the agenda — as it was in the early 1950s, again in 1975, and is of course today. Perhaps the most notable example was Harold Macmillan's much publicised 'People's House' of 1952. In reality this was nothing other than the typical council house approved during Bevan's period as Minister for Housing from 1945-50, minus a good deal of storage space, with fewer fixtures and fittings and with meaner and more cramped halls and landings. The contrast is shown in Fig 1. The basic premise of this argument, that for a given problem there is a 'basic' architectural solution, is shown in practice to be catastrophically wrong. For instance it constantly surprises policy-makers and experts that there should exist many thousands of council flats which are 'hard-to-let' and shunned by even the people most desperate for a home. They do indeed have two walls and a roof, appropriately divided up. They fulfil the basic architectural criteria for a house. So it is obvious that even the poorest people will not settle for 'basic' architecture, but demand, rightly, a great range of complex values and features in their homes.

It is without doubt one of the glories of the system of speculative house building — from the capitalist's viewpoint — that the standards of provision can be lowered at a rate unthinkable in the public sector. Fig 2 shows a comparison of the typical kind of house that a young family might have bought about ten years ago with the kind of house that they could just about afford today. The former is at a standard rather worse than the People's House of 1952. The latter quite simply returns to standards which were considered unsuitable in 1875. This is The Great Property Trick whereby people are forced, by the need to get into owner-occupied housing *on any terms,* to forego any choice or control of the standards of house they will occupy. There was a great revulsion against this kind of gerry-building approach to housing towards the end of the private house-building boom of the 1930s and it helped to strengthen and inform the demand for higher and more dignified standards in post-war housing. It cannot be long before such a campaign re-emerges.

> if they spent a lot more on fuel and less on food they could waste enough heat to keep the dampness at bay.

The idea of 'basic architecture without frills', whether the creation of the bureaucrat or the estate agent, is particularly an affront to women. Because it is largely they who manage buildings in practice, cleaning them, tidying them, making them furnished, looking after children in them, cutting out 'frills' like storage space and convenient circulation degrades their experience in a very sharp manner. The point holds true for other building types. An 'architecturally basic' hospital might consist of carefully designed wards and operating theatres. But if the result of cutting out 'frills' were to make it inconvenient to clear and to stock with goods and materials, the strain would tell on the female domestics and not on the consultant surgeons.

The 'mystique of flair'

The second, and opposite kind of reaction to the complexity of architectural problems is to develop a mystique of skill and 'flair' within the architectural profession, asserting that only a dedicated, experienced and gifted (by

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nature) few can be expected to solve these intractable problems. A solitary and heroic figure wrestles with the intractable stuff of geometry and a list of contradictory client's requirements. The result does indeed have a gloss of newness and breaking with convention. An example would be the attempt by architects in the 1960s to try and resolve the awful problems of high density housing design by an intricate interlocking and stacking of flats off 'deck access' balconies. On paper this approach, requiring a great mental agility by the architect, seemed to resolve brilliantly the conflicting geometrical and utilitarian problems of high-density housing. Unfortunatly reality was a sterner critic. The problems were not gone but turned around. For the problems of point blocks were exchanged for those of foul and windy corridors, persistent noise and damp problems from the 'decks' and views of tenement-like cramped courtyards.

Architects can be good or mediocre or incompetent. They cannot, even out of artistic struggle, design good buildings out of impossible briefs.

These kinds of issues, of health, convenience and comfort, are central to architecture. They are technical in some respects, but the technicalities are not hard to grasp. They are evidently political, although the architectural profession would like to pretend they were not. They need to become public property.

Architecture as ideology

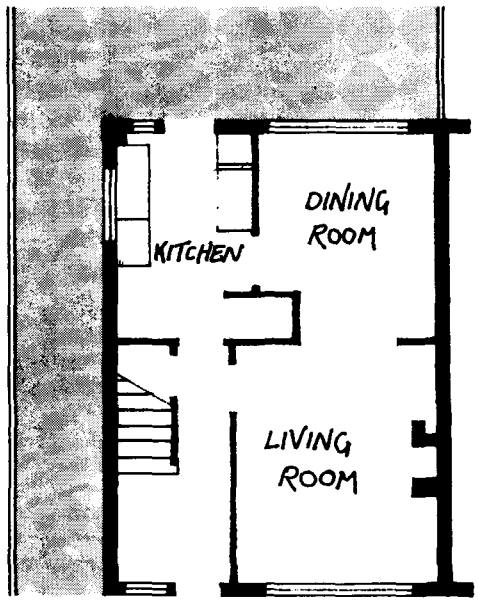
But here utilitarian issues can only be part of the agenda. For the public's apparent rejection of much modern architecture is as much because of its appearance and associations as because of its functional problems. The relationship between buildings and people includes an ideological aspect: our reactions to buildings form part of a stock of ideas and images with which we picture a whole society and within which we place ourselves. This ideological aspect of architecture is very powerful and it can change very rapidly. A building provided for a certain purpose with a certain basic technology can be styled in a completely different manner from one decade to the next: it can present a quite different ideological aspect.

This point is thrown into relief by looking at changes in the design of schools in Britain in the post-war period. The kinds of design which were canvassed in the 1940s for instance were flooded with daylight and sunlight. The classrooms have daylight coming in from two facing walls; the plans are arranged loosely along well-lit corridors with each part or function of the building separately expressed. The schools are transparent — literally, informal — architecturally, and flexible in appearance by virtue of their lightweight frame construction. By association these values are linked to the place of the school in the society as a whole. It was indeed part of the popular conception of post-war education that it would be transparent to view in the political and democratic sense, that it would be informal in method and flexible in its ability to respond to changing needs. It is easier to make these observations today than it would have been at the time: the ideological aspects of buildings, as of other areas of life, can be invisible when they have currency. They appear as natural.

In fact John Summerson, in an article written in about 1948, suggests precisely such naturalness and innocence of symbolic meaning. He argues that architecture no longer necessarily takes a monumental and dramatic place in the fabric of a civilisation:

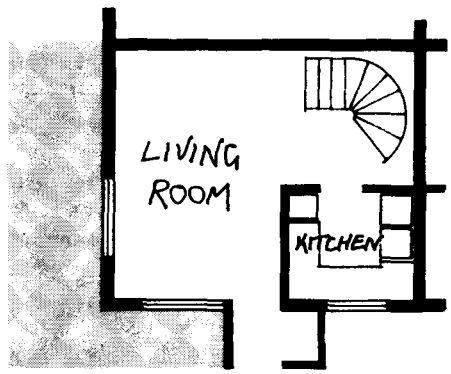
> 'In our own age it is perfectly reasonable that it should not. Architecture is no longer required to give symbolic cohesion to society. Cohesion is now maintained by new methods of communication. The chief function of architecture now is to bring a sense of dignity, refinement, subtlety, gaiety to all the places where we live and work — to bring out the values which are latent everywhere in the measured enclosure of space'.[1]

The contrast between school buildings of this period and those of the recent past and present day, and the contrast of their ideological aspects, is interesting and depressing. A notable example would be the school buildings designed by Buckinghamshire County Council in recent years. They are solid-looking brick structures, compactly arranged with steeply-pitched roofs. Some aspects of the changing design are admittedly 'technical' in character. The reduction in the area of windows is one, since the delightfully light and airy post-war school did get fearfully overheated, as many teachers can testify. But the architectural change involved much more than just putting right some technical problems. The primary force behind the overall design of the Bucks school was not technical or functional but, in the sense we have been discussing, deeply ideological. Summerson predicted an architectural future where the style of buildings would not be ideologically significant and where the parts and sequences of spaces within buidings would be experienced individually in a manner innocent of outside meaning. Other communications media could be left to glue society together. It would have shocked him to know that, a generation later, with programmes such as the Bucks schools, the revival of past styles would once again be top of the architectural agenda.



Ground floor of a typical 1972 3-bedroom house for sale (Wimpey).
Total area of house: about 816sq ft.

Figure 2



Ground floor of a typical present-day 1-bedroom 'starter' house for sale (Barratt).
Total area of house: about 396sq ft.

Looking backwards — again

In this case it is the revival of a supposed rural-vernacular-building style. Summerson's confidence in the future society no longer exists. The 'monumentality and drama' of the home counties farmyard on which the aesthetics of the Bucks school is based may seem small beer compared with older and grander revivalisms, but the essential point remains that architects increasingly need to buttress the meanings which will be ascribed to buildings with references from past styles of architecture. Is it possible, from inside our own time and without the benefit of hindsight, to disentangle the ideological significance of this

[1] John Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions*, p.209, first published 1948. Norton Library Edition 1963.

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The Ambridge style: an example from Essex County Council's design guide for new building, attempting to recreate the village.

trend? This much is clear, that it is part of that grand and endlessly running British cultural project to make the institutions of the present day seem like those of pre-industrial, agrarian, village society. To make a school look like an old farm shows a wistfulness about the past and perhaps a cynicism about the idea of a welfare state and the significance of an education system to it.

This revival of past architectural styles presently threatens to turn from a refreshing breeze to gale force. The design of shopping centres, that distinct architectural creation of the post-war period, is another example of this. Recently a large US company commissioned a group of chic architects to suggest some new designs for the facades of their superstores. The results contained every variety of revivalism and a good measure of re-working of classical clichés. Less exuberantly, British supermarket firms are now becoming adept at disguising new buildings as tithe barns, village squares and at tacking 'vernacular' brickwork details on to large steel structures. There is no doubt that in such cases the ideological work being done is of the pill-sugaring kind. If we have to shop at supermarkets rather than the corner shop (where other pundits say that we should in order to sustain the traditional community), and if we must buy mass-produced food instead of the hand-made kind said to be good for us, then we can at least do so in a kind of architectural Ambridge.

Two qualifications must be made to these criticisms. Firstly the newly-acquired ability of architects to put new shopping centres carefully behind existing facades in old towns should be applauded, although even here it is often after the bitter and anxious struggle of civic amenity groups, those much-ridiculed arms of British political life. Even so, respecting the value of existing historic buildings is a different issue from the attempt to create a saccharine history.

Revivalism versus Functionalism

Secondly, and more importantly, the revivalist wind has by no means swept all before it. Its great antagonist, functionalism, has survived many changes of emphasis and direction to remain the alternative focus of architectural analysis and guidance for practice. Like other great movements it is notoriously divided into sects who hold to narrow truths. In 1938 Le Corbusier, perhaps the most important architect of the twentieth century, wrote a short article for a magazine started by young, and mostly left-wing, architects and students, called *If I Had To Teach You Architecture*. It expresses well the crucial points of the general attitide which here is described as functionalist:

> 'How do you make a door? How big? Where do you put it? How do you make a window? But, incidentally, what is a window for? Do you really know why they make windows? If so, you will be able to explain to me why a window is arched, square, or rectangular. I want reasons for that, and would add: Think hard: do we need windows at all today?
>
> In what part of a room do you make a door? . . . Perhaps you have several solutions. You are right, there are several solutions, and each one gives a separate architectural sensation. You see — these differences of solution are the very basis of architecture. According to the way you enter a room and according to the position of the door in the wall, you get a particular impression, and the wall which you pierce takes on particular characteristics. You feel you have discovered architecture. By the way, I forbid you to draw an axis on your plans — axes are merely formulae to dazzle the unwary.'

and

> 'When you have achieved through plans and sections a working entity the elevations will follow, and if you have any power of design, your elevations will be beautiful. Say, by all means that houses are for living in but you will be a good architect when your elevations succeed. Proportion is enough, but you will need plenty of imagination as well, and the more modest the problem, the more imagination you need.
>
> Architecture is organisation. YOU ARE AN ORGANISER, NOT A DRAWING-BOARD STYLIST.[2]

Analyse the problem, to the absurd if necessary, into its component parts; realise that the different possible solutions have

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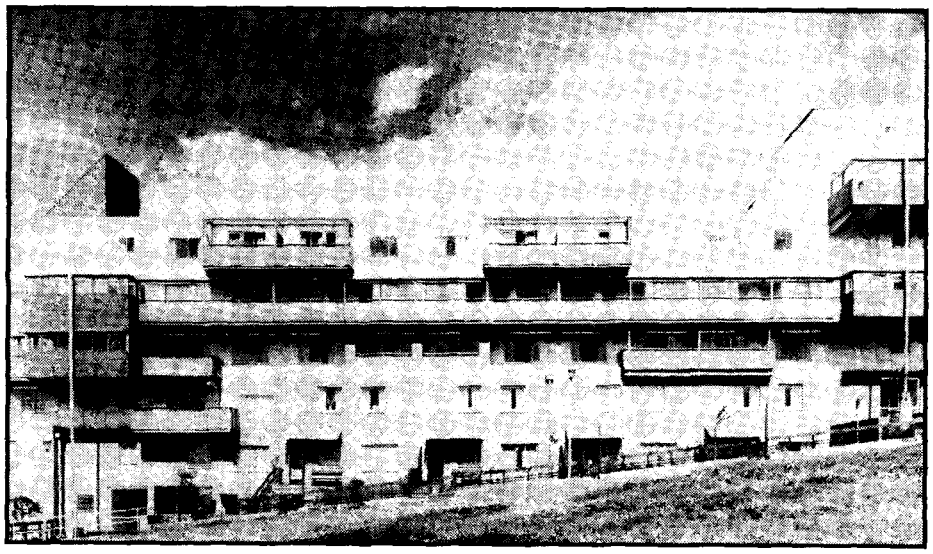

New housing at Byker, Newcastle. One of the last of the big redevelopment schemes and one of the best.

symbolic as well as utilitarian aspects; produce a 'working entity' before thinking about the facades; follow the logic of that entity in designing the facades, but use imagination as well; but primarily, architecture is organisation, not styling. Functionalism expressed in this way is complex and ambiguous: it is full of potholes for the unwary designer and presents a shockingly uneven and seamed surface to the eye of the roving architectural critic. It does however have the enormous strength of a confidence in its own ability to produce a satisfactory architecture by a rational attention to current problems without resort to fragments of past ways of building.

Despite a virtually continuous academic attack since the early 1960s it is an extraordinary resilient and powerful movement. An example from the frontier of its achievement is the series of housing schemes designed by Ralph Erskine's office, notably that at Byker in Newcastle. The design of these houses, their detailed construction, appearance and layout, comes out of a long and exhaustive study of the siting, technical and social constraints of designing high-density housing, a study which at Byker involved the participation of the future inhabitants of the scheme. The newly-built area has precisely that dignity, refinement, subtlety, gaiety, which Summerson hoped would be characteristic of post-war architecture.

In its ideological aspect therefore, there are disputes about the appropriateness of certain styles for daily life, and about how styles are derived at all. Unbelievably, a new battle of the styles, as in the nineteenth century, between the 'vernacularists' and the 'classicists', is getting under way. In architecture the real struggle is whether we can learn to design our own future or whether the future will always have to be a re-creation of the past. This struggle should become public property.

The conservative onslaught

A repeated theme of this article has been that certain discussions about architecture, currently the preserve of experts and professionals, should be the subject of public and political debate. In fact the terms of some of the debate are already being set by a strong and articulate intervention of conservatives in architecture. The regime of public spending cuts and the attack on the standards of public sector building is the sharp end of this onslaught. It is supported however by a set of more subtle offensives. Michael Heseltine, for example, has offered architects a new kind of settlement in return for their compliance in cuts in the building workload. This consists of a carefully-cultivated reputation as a man concerned about 'quality, not quantity' — implied in a number of judgements to prevent the destruction of historic buildings and in favour of slightly less than unbridled opportunities for property speculators in sites of scenic significance in central London. Beside this is a stated enthusiasm for the competition system of design for major public buildings. The practical record of such competitions in Britain in recent years is catastrophic. It says something for the architectural profession's attachment to the values of the marketplace (or the sweepstake) that they can applaud when this tattered card is brought out of the pack again. Parallel with these governmental moves is the development of an explicitly reactionary grouping of architectural critics whose aim is to attack all versions of modernism in architecture as aspects of fascist or bolshevist totalitarianism. Here the primacy of classical

architecture and the rule of taste are to be re-established. Architecture is to be seen as a distinct realm with its own laws unrelated to anything outside it. Where we would argue for the widening of the discussion of architecture in the various ways which have been sketched out, the thrust of this work is to narrow it. The art historian David Watkin has claimed that the notion of 'the spirit of the age' is at the root of the dangers of modernism and that this, 'combined with the historicist emphasis on progress and the necessary superiority of novelty, has come dangerously close to undermining on the one hand, or appreciation of the imaginative genius of the individual, and, on the other, the importance of artistic tradition.'[3]

The purpose and content of buildings, so the argument goes, is outside the scope of these discussions: social analysis and aesthetic theory have no business in common. 'Individual genius' and 'artistic tradition' are the key words in the aesthetic sphere, leaving the social sphere free for the play of the market. A century ago William Morris described this attitude as 'the tyranny compounded of utilitarianism and dilettantism'. It is the architecture of the workhouse: a well-proportioned facade, a classical pediment, a noble entrance. For those who pass through its door there is a life of iron discipline, of meagre subsistence, and a cold which freezes the breath. □

[2] Le Corbusier, *If I Had To Teach You Architecture*, first published 1938.

[3] David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture*, p.115, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1977.

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Discussion

Housing

Mark Page

The Tory government's break with the social democratic consensus of previous Labour and Conservative governments, the crisis of legitimacy of council housing and the Left's difficulties and failures in housing policy were well charted in Michael Jones' recent article ('The Tories: Bringing the House Down' — *Marxism Today* May 1980) and David Griffiths' discussion article (*Marxism Today* August 1980). There is no doubt that the Left must change course. However, I wish to contest a few of the points made in the debate so far and suggest some directions in which Left policy should be taken further.

The housing shortage is not over

According to the government's Public Expenditure White Paper, housing spending will be cut by 48% in real terms by 1984. A major ideological weapon used by the Tories in this process is the argument that there is no longer a crude shortage of housing, merely some little local difficulties.

It is anticipated that there will be a shortfall compared with need of up to 500,000 dwellings in Britain by the mid 1980s (First Report of the House of Commons Environment Committee). The numbers of people still in need of housing in London is far greater than that projected by the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1978 and in 1986 there will be between 297,000 and 340,000 more households in need of accommodation in London than previously expected (GLC Housing Strategy Appraisal 1981-1983). Once allowance has been made for the 63% fall in housing starts in London between 1968 and 1979 (38% in the rest of Britain), the much heralded arrival of a housing surplus in the capital city will be a non-event.

Homelessness is rapidly rising. In one London borough the number of homeless families has risen steadily from 50 in January 1980 to 195 in September. Four councils in north and east London, three of them on Heseltine's hit-list, will spend between them close to £2m in 1980/81 on hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families.

400,000 properties in London are expected to reach the end of their useful lives in the period 1980-1993 creating 'irreversible decay in some parts of London' (GLC Housing Strategy Appraisal).

While the tired old arguments of municipal socialists about housing supply have rightly been accused of economism and have justified some appalling housing schemes in our cities, they cannot be dismissed easily. For large sections of the working people — the poorest, the oldest and the youngest still lack decent housing — the numbers game is still relevant. Meeting need, not just by building two and three bedroom dwellings for nuclear families, is still an important area for the Left to debate.

Socialism in one tenure: socialism in one class

David Griffiths rightly attacked the limited policy and practice of many socialists over housing supply and low rents — socialism in one tenure. However, the arguments over the equity of state subsidies towards current housing payments made by council tenants and owner-occupiers and how these two groups may or may not receive capital gains has certain dangers. In concentrating on the distribution of costs and benefits between these two tenures, there is the less narrow but different temptation of arguing socialism in one class. We most develop our understanding of the distribution of costs and benefits between classes. Only recently has the Left begun to develop its policies around the political economy of house construction, land ownership (particularly development land and urban land) and state policies in planning, financing and constructing houses and how the consumption of housing is distributed. Socialists in the housing field must challenge the content and form of ruling class domination and our proposals on the democratising of state policies, particularly those of the local authorities, will be crucial.

New demands of capital

The recession and government monetarist policy are benefiting some sections of capital and not others. With the exception of one or two firms, the building construction sector of the economy is in severe slump. At the same time the banks, financial institutions and building societies are awash with surpluses. The contradictions of this process are beginning to make themselves apparent.

Michael Jones noted in his article the insistent voice of the *Financial Times* in the debate about owner occupation and public spending. Briefly, the *Financial Times* is arguing for the abolition of tax relief on mortgages and the imposition of a capital gains tax on house sales. Also, by diverting savings from house ownership and from building societies, forcing a limited collapse in house prices and by breaking up the privileged tax and legal position of the building society cartel, it is hoped that investment funds will flow into industry and government bonds and release new areas for profit making. In anticipation of the biting winds of free competition in this market, the Abbey National Building Society has already introduced a competitor to the new government 'grandperson savings bond' and is setting up with the Tesco supermarket chain sales of life assurance linked to savings plans. Meanwhile, to maintain the socially responsible face of the 'movement', it is planning to invest in housing renewal schemes run by local councils in the inner city areas.

This form of new competition, which is likely to monopolise the building society

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sector, plus reductions in state subsidies to house owners, could dramatically affect the fortunes of many owner occupiers. (All these proposals were hastily but incompetently denied by the Cabinet office earlier this year.) Particularly badly affected would be first time buyers and poor house owners. Finance capital would not be interested in the distributional effects of such a policy within the working class, although it would present electoral dangers for the Tory Party. It may become a matter of political urgency to develop the proposals put forward by Michael Jones, should the Government decide to engulf some sections of house owners in financial difficulties and hasten the rapid decline in repair standards.

State policy and housing costs

Low rent policies put forward by many municipal socialists are often suspect, but David Griffiths' arguments against them are not helpful. Individualistic ideology in Britain supports private payments for private costs. An elaborate pretence is erected to maintain this image for the owner occupier, even when it can be shown that large state subsidies are given to people in this tenure. Only recently and reluctantly has the Treasury allowed tax relief on mortgages to be shown as public expenditure. State subsidies are also given to council tenants and both lots of subsidies are partly to compensate for the high and increasing cost of debt and land charged by the owners of finance and land.

Challenging individualistic ideology is important for socialists and it is necessary to be clear about the social nature of housing need and social nature of the production of the past and present housing stock and its costs. To argue that the Left should not accept automatically low rent policies and support this on the basis of increased rent allowances and rebates to those tenants in greatest need is not acceptable. Irrespective of the low take up of these benefits, they are individual welfare handouts, albeit less alienating than supplementary benefit, but still representing individualistic notions of welfare. As a non-universal, means tested benefit they can undermine collective activity and consciousness in housing struggles.

Socialist policies that support state subsidy of the construction, rent, repair and maintenance of council housing are compatible with an extension of state and socialised payments and services towards the production of houses for sale and their continued maintenance and repair. In themselves such policies for state intervention are not sufficient as socialist policies, unless they are part of the struggle for radical and democratic transformations of the state as an organiser of the social life of society. Demands for democratic change in state welfare policies and the elimination of the various forms of oppression that have made the welfare state so difficult to defend are an essential part of socialist politics.

There is already a universal state system of making contributions to housing costs. For owner-occupiers it is unprogressive (tax relief), indirect (environmental improvements/conservation) and individual (improvement grants). All these payments are relatively invisible and appear as private transactions. In contrast paying for council housing is highly visible (council estates), subversive (rents do not cover costs) and expensive (public housing accounts). A Left policy on rent must be devised in the context of developing the experience of the social nature of housing provision and its costs. For example, a policy of tax relief on repairs and improvements to houseowners alongside the subsidy to the repair and maintenance of council houses and perhaps the work of a Direct Labour Organisation available to both groups would seem to be a fair distribution of these particular costs and a collective way of managing the repair of a national and social asset.

Housing and the alternative economic strategy

The labour movement's alternative economic strategy (AES) has no significant housing content. Yet housing policy has great economic consequences.

68% of present day fixed capital accumulation is in the form of buildings, houses being a part of this. The construction industry forms 6½% of all production in Britain. 50% of all personal savings is represented by private home ownership. High interest rates on mortgages, the rapidly increasing volume of credit, high price inflation with an even higher rate in the growth of building costs and a slump in new house construction are all features of the current crisis of capital and directly relate to housing policy.

The implementation of the AES counter crisis strategy could transform the pattern of credit and interest rates, change ownership of land and construction capital by forms of nationalisation and by its extension of the public sector could have major effects on house owners and their expectations. Since mass support for a government pursuing the AES must include large numbers of house owners, it is a necessary condition for the success of such a strategy that it include detailed proposals of how housing finance would be organised. The supporters of the AES have got to develop this dimension.

May 14: an assessment

Kevin Halpin

The article on May 14 was a very much needed assessment. Peter Carter raises certain issues that I believe need a great deal of discussion.

The stoppage was historic; it was the first call for political motives by the TUC. Those who read about the General Strike, and the government's opposition with mass mobilisation of the state, could believe that it was a political strike. The issues may have become clouded, but basically they were in support of economic demands to prevent wage cuts. The Triple Alliance, led by the miners, was the basic force. Under pressure, TUC leaders reluctantly gave support until told that they could bring down the government when they quickly called the strike off and left the miners to their own devices and defeat.

The call by the TUC in May was much wider. It was a call for opposition to all government policies — economic, unemployment and anti-trade union legislation.

Why didn't it have more support than that indicated? One thing stands out; many workers fell for the argument that, at a time of economic depression, it is essential to be competitive. After all, the setbacks at Leyland were influenced by the feeling that to be militant might mean the end of the job. Many places voted to work, and since then they have found, to their dismay, that instead of increasing the chances of working their lack of support has given this government more strength boldly to attack our class. Many of the unemployed who were in Brighton for the demonstration at the Tory Party Conference on October 10 showed that they have learned this lesson.

The other issue that is raised is the ability of the TUC to conduct day-to-day campaigning. The position is clear. The TUC is the joining together of trade unions to discuss common problems and take these deliberations away. Each trade union is autonomous and reserves the right to carry

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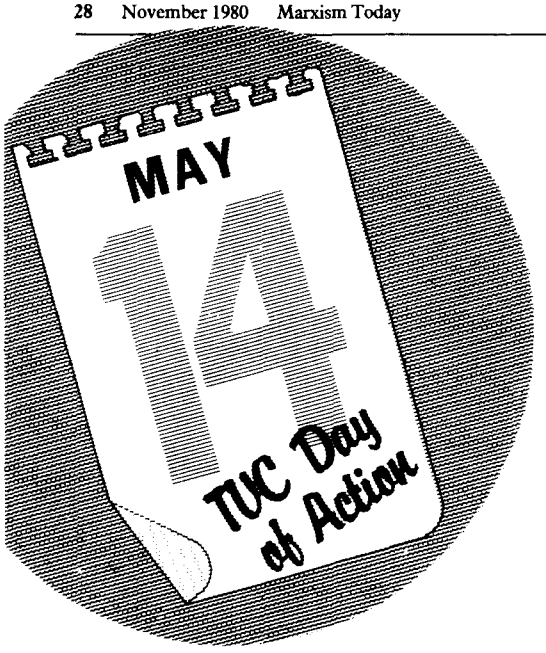
Discussion



out the policy of its national committee or national conference. Hence the statements by those like Frank Chapple against May 14 and many other issues decided by the General Council and Congress.

A general staff

The TUC should be the general staff of the working class. After all, whether it is miners or steel workers on strike, it is not co-ordinating action at all. This has been raised at successive annual TUCs, but has always been shelved. Why? A strong, central leadership is a good organisational form. The problem comes when it relates to the political nature of the leadership's policies. Many of the right-wing policies have been defeated in the past by left-wing unions reserving their right to fight on wages etc, at a time when incomes policies were imposed.

For the General Council to become the general staff would require a qualitative change in trade union structure, which has traditionally been different to many others, where craft and sectional unions tended to set up the structure.

To those who would oppose having a central leadership, I would ask them if they think we are going back to the days of small-scale capitalism, when each employer stood on his own feet. But this is not true. Policies are made more and more by the multi-nationals who control government policy. The great furore about Margaret Thatcher's independent view is part of the smokescreen to make the Tory Party appear separate from the big employers. Profits prove that this isn't so. Therefore, the working class need co-ordinated action to prevent their defeat section by section. The working class could suffer a temporary setback now if they become disillusioned with non-coordinated actions.

No organisational changes, no matter how effective, are a substitute for politics. Much of the trade uniion propaganda was long-term and excellent but it couldn't respond to the prolonged, day-to-day anti-trade union build-up by the media where any trade unionist, no matter how disreputable, could be made into an anti-May 14 hero. The main change was that the trade union leaders, whose very word had been praised when speaking for wage restraint, found that they were attacked. The trade union leaders who previously had gone along with strong attacks on active stewards found themselves in the same position.

Apart from regional councils and the STUC, the propaganda response was not very strong. The trade unions found that their reliance on capitalist media coverage put them at a grave disadvantage. They could only ask for the right of reply, frequently to be scoffed at.

The question of a trade union paper is raised again and again. It will only come about by the consistent fight and participation of factories, pits, workshops and offices. But surely the thing omitted from the debate is what to do about it *now*. Even Pete writes of an official selling 120 copies of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, but did the excellent building official sell the *Morning Star*? This was also apparent at the media debate at this year's TUC, and shows that the fight for the *Morning Star* hasn't been broached, mainly because the fight would seem an all-round political debate. At a time when our paper is reflecting the broad, trade union spectrum of politics, this is a key issue for our attention.

Why not a one-hour strike

The problem of May 14 was that, in spite of the pressure from Sheffield and South Wales, the decision for a one-day stoppage was taken at a high level without reference back. The centralised decision was correct, but what about the need to go back to the lads and lasses.

I believe that the call for a one-day stoppage has become the standard call, not only at the TUC, but also at Liaison Committees etc. Wouldn't it be better to make the call for united action, say, for one hour, all round? At least there would be a bigger response for mass meetings which would be attended, rather than the one day being a stay-home day for so many.

Miners will say, what good is one hour down a pit where nobody can see you. But European trade unions have built up actions on the basis of limited stoppages moving towards extensive action. I put it to you that ten million people stopping for one hour is better than one million stopping for a day.

It has also been said that a one day action was not ongoing action, and that one day was not going to stop the Tories. There should have been a programme of action with a long-term objective. After all, the response to the initial call by the Liaison Committee for a July Lobby of the House, the September 1 Lobby of the TUC and the October 10 demonstration at the Tory Conference, shows the need for a perspective. The unions which, at national level, also took the initiative show that action is needed, particularly on the unemployed. The decision by Sheffield Council to grant £1,000 to send the unemployed to Brighton is important. In the face of Tory attacks on this decision their response was quite simple, unemployed Tories could join the coaches if they wished! In all the debate about contact with the unemployed, this is an advanced practical step.

A long-term programme

A programme with a long-term aim could have been feasible, particularly if it had gone hand-in-hand with day-by-day solidarity with those fighting on cuts and sackings. The Liverpool docks situation was notable not only for the stand of the dockers and three executives, but the immediate response from the NUR of solidarity as they also have members in the ports.

It is clear that the struggle was held back, and is repeatedly so, by right-wing Labour. The lessons of Woodrow Wyatt, George Brown and Reg Prentice have not been learned. The speech by Callaghan at the TUC was clearly one about more hard work and struggle in hard times. This leads one to conclude that Callaghan's Marxism is nil.

The Gross Domestic Product fell 2% in the first and second quarters of 1980, but the first and second quarters' trading profits of industrial and commercial companies increased: in the first quarter from £4673 million to £6103 million and in the second quarter from £5568 million to £6464 million (FT, 23/9/80). This, at a time when the workforce dropped by half a million — fewer workers = more profits = greater exploitation. This needs to be hammered alongside the fact that there is no need for economies. The oil revenue should be used to expand life and living standards, economically, socially and culturally instead of expanding profits, arms and affluence. Many Communists and those on the Left are preaching this, but the contrick has not yet been exposed. □

We welcome Discussion contributions on articles appearing in the journal

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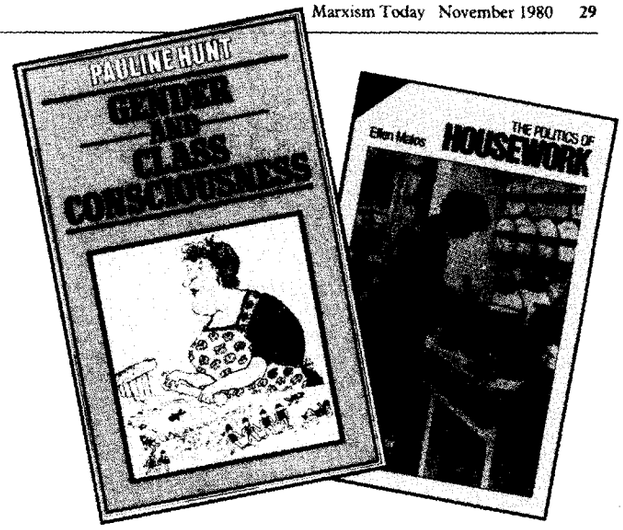
Reviews



THE POLITICS OF HOUSEWORK
ed E Malos
Allison and Busby 286 pp £3.95

GENDER AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS
Pauline Hunt
Macmillan hb £15.00

It has become increasingly difficult to think (let alone to say) that housework is a boring and trivial subject. No doubt many readers of *Marxism Today* will have participated in acrimonious disputes about the doing of it. The women's liberation movement has politicised housework (as *work*) and the subject of housework plays an important part in socialist feminist thinking about women's oppression. The division of labour at home is closely connected to the division of labour between men and women in wage work, and the running of the domestic economy has been linked to the ongoing reproduction of capitalism. In different ways these two books bring housework back to our attention at an opportune moment.

The collection edited by Ellen Malos is a very useful introduction to some of the key areas of debate. It preserves in a convenient form several contributions from the women's movement which are now difficult to obtain, and it gives an indication of the way the politics of housework became an issue in Marxist political economy.

The contents of this anthology are difficult to classify, and I spent some time wondering on what principles it was constructed. It begins with a review essay by the editor; next there is a historical section, beginning with a lucid 'history of the housewife' by Catherine Hall and moving on to some pieces on housework by feminists writing before the war; then we move to the present era of women's liberation. This section includes some very good polemical pieces, among them the paper by Pat Mainardi which ends with the notorious comment by the author's husband — '*Housework?* he said. Housework. Oh, my God, how trivial can you get. A paper on housework.'

The rest of the book deals mainly with two issues: the demand for 'wages for housework', and the Marxist 'domestic labour debate'. The issues involved in the wages for housework campaign, represented here as elsewhere by the ubiquitous Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, are critically dealt with in the accompanying reprints of articles from the socialist feminist magazine *Red Rag*. We are then given a rather frustrating taste of the approach to housework that sees it in terms of political economy. This perspective, although generating a remarkable flow of published work in the 1970s, has now been widely criticised for failing to get to grips with familial and domestic ideology other than in terms of its usefulness to capital. Its treatment here is odd in the sense that the two contributions published include one which is a 'reply' (published in *New Left Review*) to Wally Seccombe's article on 'The Housewife and her Labour Under Capitalism'.[1] The omission of Seccombe's article, given the frequency with which it is quoted as a benchmark piece in the debate about domestic labour, is symptomatic of the overall intentions of this volume. It's not so much that Seccombe is excluded as a man (although all the contributors are women), as an attempt to present the politics of housework exclusively as an issue internal to the women's movement. The anthology as a whole demonstrates the abiding concern of feminists with the question of housework, and rightly stresses the degree to which women's liberationists have politicised the issue. Yet the ways in which 'domestic labour' has been taken up in Marxist theory are in themselves quite interesting and it doesn't necessarily help our understanding of the weaknesses of some Marxist accounts of women's oppression to deny the extent to which male theoreticians have attempted to confront these issues.

The book is, in part, a record of the different ways in which housework has been taken up over a period of time and yet, as the history of a debate, it is somewhat underedited. I found myself continually turning to the copyright acknowledgements to try and locate the historical context of particular articles. So in this sense the selection is perhaps a somewhat arbitrary tip of the iceberg, but one with enough excellent pieces in it to make it a very useful book to have available.

Pauline Hunt's *Gender and Class Consciousness* takes up the question of housework in the context of an extremely detailed and fascinating account of some families in a Staffordshire mining village. She is interested in the relationship between the domestic division of labour and its accompanying ideology of the male breadwinner and dependent wife, and the consciousness of women and men at work and in their political and trade union activities. Hunt describes in considerable depth the perceptions her interviewees have of their domestic rights and responsibilities. The material is organised according to the three groups in the sample — childless couples; couples with one wage-earner, one houseworker and children; couples with children where both parents are wage-earners.

Hunt makes some interesting points about the ways in which the day to day running and experience of family life relate to the sexual division of labour in society generally. The perception, for instance, of mother's wage as useful for marginal or 'luxury' expenditure can be seen as rational in a situation where the employment of married women really is insecure and the family cannot afford to attach too much weight to her earnings.

The most fascinating dimension to the

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book, the probing of people's perceptions of their respective domestic responsibilities, also provides us with the most difficult problem of interpretation. How can we systematise these idiosyncratic individual views of the world? To take an example, there is the difference between Alan and Joe. Alan is not an appealing character. His wife Carol puts up with his refusal to cook, his dictates about what food she must serve and so on with a relatively good grace but the one thing she does object to is his habit of walking through the house in muddy shoes, casting down his overalls and shoes wherever he happens to be. This bone of contention — that he won't tidy up his things — appears in his consciousness like this:

Interviewer: Is there anything to do with the house or child that Carol is particularly fussy about?

Alan: There is something, but I can't think what it is now. (He shouts to Carol, who is in the kitchen.) 'What do you get on to me about sometimes?'

Carol: 'Shifting your things.'

Alan: 'Ah, yes.'

Now Joe is quite a different proposition. Although he doesn't like to be seen to be doing the housework, he's quite prepared to actually do it. His wife says:

Gladys: He would never wheel a pram out. He would say, 'Take these children out, and everything will be done when you get back'. And the house would be like a new pin. He'd do everything. He'd do the house all through, and I mean literally all through. He'd pick up all the lino and wipe underneath it, he wouldn't just wipe the floor surface. *But*, he'd stop when he got as far as the back door step; that was that, because he wouldn't want nobody to see him with a scrubbing brush and mop, or a bucket or whatever in his hand.

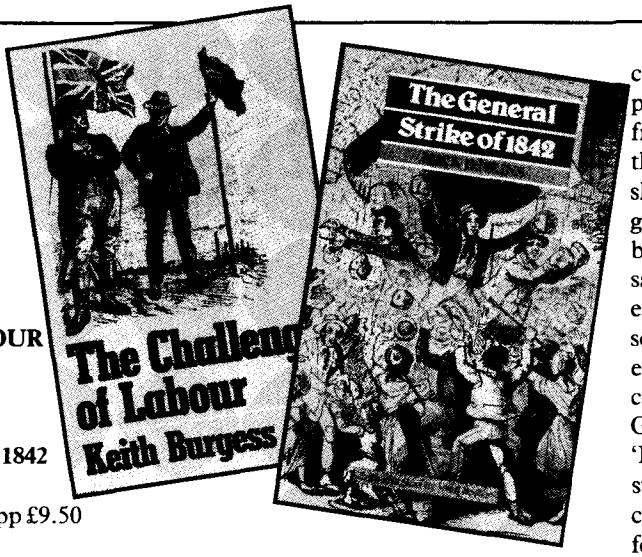
It doesn't seem plausible that we can account for these differences in any systematic way. Although it's the case that Alan has a full-time wife to minister to his boorishness and Joe is in a situation where his wife goes out to work there is an inescapable element of personality variation colouring the scene. This is not a criticism of the book, merely an indication of the complexity of a situation where every attempt to understand the politics of housework is beset by the vagaries of personal experience.

These two books, however, provide a welcome insistence on the importance of the household and relations between the sexes within it, to the overall project of women's liberation. They are timely too. The present government, to add to its many other disastrous policies for women, is apparently now considering implementation of the one 'demand' consistently rejected by the women's movement in this country — wages for housework. It appears, in a euphemistic form, in the proposal to re-allocate revenue from eventual abolition of the married man's tax allowance as 'a cash payment for a spouse with domestic responsibilities'.[2] Any such move would be profoundly at variance with the changes for which feminists have been struggling. The enormous popular support for 'wages for housework', and the ability of this campaign to command some degree of state sympathy for its proposals, should give rise to very serious thought if we are not to see a further entrenchment of women into the 'domestic responsibilities' of housework and childcare.

Michèle Barrett

[1] Wally Seccombe 'The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism' *New Left Review* No 83 1974.

[2] *The Observer* 31/8/1980.



THE CHALLENGE OF LABOUR
Keith Burgess
Croom Helm 1980 269pp £12.50

THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1842
Mick Jenkins
Lawrence and Wishart 1980 300pp £9.50

A number of writers have used terms like 'labourism' and 'corporatism' to refer to the political limitations of the British labour movement. This certainly points to a deep-rooted characteristic, and a key problem for the Left. Yet it is a gross over-simplification — and a politically dangerous one — to ignore the conflicts and crises through which the terms of working-class subordination have been fought out.

The process of challenge and re-definition is the theme of *The Challenge of Labour*. Keith Burgess focuses on the de-stabilising pressures that upset the 'accommodation of labour' established in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and consequent shifts in ruling-class strategies and ideologies. The development of the ruling class and the state are placed in the centre of the historical stage. State intervention, just before and more strongly during the First World War, was shaped by, and in turn shaped working-class struggles. While aspects of the argument are open to question and qualification the book is a stimulating attempt at an overall interpretation, which hopefully will initiate further discussion.

The core of the book, and its most convincing part, is an analysis of the new pressures experienced by British capitalism from the 1880s to the 1920s, and the shifts in the forms of class rule they necessitated — shifts which were by no means automatically guaranteed. The treatment of the periods before and after this central crisis is less satisfactory. Here Burgess does not entirely escape the static and fatalistic implications of some accounts of 'labourism'. The book ends, rather enigmatically, with the re-consolidation of 'labourism' following the General Strike, and a suggestion that 'Keynesian corporatism' has held undisputed sway down to the present, when it is under challenge; this seems to over-simplify and foreshorten the intervening years.

Similar problems arise in the treatment of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, where Burgess gives a rather schematic account of differences within the working class (the 'labour aristocracy') and exaggerates class collaboration and the influence of bourgeois ideologies. While he rightly emphasises the role of a variety of agencies outside the 'political' sphere narrowly defined, his account of this underplays the real conflicts which threatened the stability of mid-Victorian society, notably working-class resistance to direct and manipulative forms of control.

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The continuing presence of labour organisation was a permanent gain from the bitter confrontations of the first half of the century. *The General Strike of 1842* investigates a high point of struggle, when resistance to wage cuts developed into a general strike for democracy. Mick Jenkins sets out to demonstrate the scope and coherence of the movement. This is in some ways an uneven book, with a tendency to lapse into over-rhetorical polemic, but its main case is important and well argued.

It is clear from the evidence presented here that historians have under-estimated the movement of 1842. The links with Chartism were not a reflex of blind protest but part of an organic tradition of working-class activity and leadership, reflecting a 'solemn and conscientious conviction'. This conviction influenced factory operatives and the skilled trades, who are often portrayed as less committed to Chartism than depressed out-working trades like weavers.

Questions remain, however, about how widely these aspirations were shared, and the uneven development of the movement in different trades and regions. Jenkins emphasises the role of the new factory proletariat in cotton and metals. While this is clearly important, it has to be seen in the context of the radical political culture which had developed over a long period among out-workers and the urban workshop crafts. Factory trades like the spinners and skilled engineers had much in common with the 'old' crafts. More could be said about divisions within the working class, and the depth of mobilisation and unity. For instance the role of women in pickets and demonstrations is noted, yet attitudes to female labour often reflected patriarchal values, with demands for the exclusion of women from spheres of employment. The Charter itself demanded male suffrage only, and images of 'suffering wives and helpless children' and appeals to 'be men' recur in the Chartist documents quoted here.

The book argues that these events represent a historical turning-point in class relationships. They mark a change in ruling-class strategy, with the toleration of limited kinds of protest and concessions on the economic front. The aftermath of the confrontation thus contributed to the separation of 'industrial' from 'political' spheres and the growth of reformist labour organisation in limited sections of the working class.

It is probably valid to identify a broad shift in approach, and to detect signs of it from the mid-1840s, following the period of acute crisis culminating in 1842. The very volume of anguished debate about the 'condition of England' indicates, not so much the depth of crisis, as the increased confidence that social tensions could be controlled and alleviated. 1842 undoubtedly made a material contribution to this process, but it may be too simple to identify a single turning-point. As the author rightly points out, divisions within the ruling class were an important factor, with other groups showing deep suspicion of the manufacturers. Changing approaches to labour reflect shifts in the balance of interests and opinions, not simply changes in the strategy of a homogeneous ruling class. Specific values and attitudes in government and the state, for instance the inhibitions placed on outright repression by traditions of constitutional legality, also helped determine responses to working-class activity.

But reservations about some of the answers apart, the questions asked are significant ones. And the central case for the importance of these events is well made. Perhaps the most important feature of the strike was the organisational capacity and self-confidence of the workers. That particular advance was a permanent one, even if it could no longer be linked to political programmes.

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NOTES

THE RADICAL BOOKSELLER

Dave Berry writes: The last 10 years has seen a tremendous revival in radical publishing. Publishers such as Virago, Centreprise, Pluto and many more have brought into print not only theoretical and political works, but also handbooks for trade unionists, contemporary and forgotten fiction and even atlases and diaries. Side by side with this there has developed a 'new wave' of radical and community bookshops throughout the country and a radical distributor, PDC, has encouraged a strong profile for smaller book, pamphlet and magazine publishers in the book trade. Yet what has been missing is a regular publication covering all aspects of the radical book world. We are hoping that our new magazine, *The Radical Bookseller*, will fill this gap.

The first issue appeared in October and the response so far has been very good. Many large commercial bookshops and central libraries have already taken out subscriptions and are already using the magazine as a major reference source. The major attraction for them is the 'Radical Books of the Month' — a comprehensive listing of all new publications, and we encourage all publishers of the Left to send their new titles in for inclusion. The first issue also looks at radical bookshops and carries news and views about both the radical and the commercial book trade. The second issue this month will start a regular column on trade unions in the bookworld and will have an in depth feature on Collets. Available on subscription only (10 issues £15 institutions, £10 individuals) from The Radical Bookseller, Unit 265m, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

ECONOMIC BULLETIN

John Fairley writes: Issue 7 of the *Economic Bulletin*, the journal of the Communist Party's Economic Advisory Committee, will be available in November. The *Economic Bulletin* aims to discuss and develop the Left's alternative economic strategy, to review left policy development in other countries, and to keep up with some developments in economic theory, but, in all of this, to be open in its approach, and intelligible to non-economists.

In this issue, Mark Harrison assesses the Soviet economy in the period of the tenth five year plan. F Di Ruzza, an economist in the French Communist Party, gives his view of the economic policy aspects of the break in left unity in France in 1977, and outlines current thinking in the Common Programme. In other articles, Ron Bellamy looks at the relation between the Tory government and monopoly capital, and David Cobham examines the effect of EEC membership on Britain's growth rate. Reviews deal with employment policy, the Common Market and recent books by Bob Rowthorn and Ben Fine.

Subscriptions to the *Economic Bulletin* cost £1.80 for two issues, and can be arranged through Central Books, 14 The Leathermarket, London SE1.

SOCIALIST ECONOMIC REVIEW

Lawrence Harris writes: At this time, when the Right's political and ideological offensive is centered on its economic policies, the Left's alternative economic strategy (AES) is of great significance. Its adoption by many sections of the labour movement is an indicator of this. Since the AES is not a slogan but a concrete strategy for transforming the British economy it has to be discussed, evaluated and moved forward at every opportunity.

At the end of September socialist economists practising in universities, trade union research departments and other research offices held a conference to further this discussion and evaluation. In the new year the papers of the conference are to be published by Merlin Press as a book entitled *Socialist Economic Review*. The three opening papers of the conference and Review examine the present crisis from the perspectives of the British economy, the international economy and financial system, and the third world respectively, in each case underlining the capitalist governments' policy responses. These are followed by papers on the main aspects of the alternative economic strategy as a whole and the remaining half of the papers are on specific aspects of the economic situation and the AES. Their subjects range over nationalisation, import controls, monetarism and expenditure cuts, taxation and incentives, unemployment, inflation and incomes policies, energy policy, and the principles of democratic planning.

The conference and Review are oriented toward concrete and policy centered issues, and thus to contribute to the labour movement's resources. This Review is intended to be the first of an annual series.

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We are very pleased to announce that the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize for 1980 has been awarded to Bob Rowthorn, a member of our Editorial Board, for his book *Capitalism, Conflict and Inflation* which was published earlier this year by Lawrence and Wishart. The prize is awarded annually to the author of the book which the judges feel has made the greatest contribution to the development of Marxist thought.

In his review of Bob's book in our June issue, Andrew Glynn wrote: 'The essays collected in this volume form the basis of Bob Rowthorn's justly deserved reputation as the most original of the generation of Marxist economists which emerged in Britain in the sixties and early seventies'. Until now the book has only been available in hardback, but in November it will be published in paperback form at £3.95 which will enable many more people to read what is a very important work. We offer our congratulations to Bob.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

As from this issue, *Marxism Today*'s new address is 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY, Telephone 01-251 4406.
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